

University of Alberta

The Experience of Adolescent Girls in an Abusive Relationship

by

Carolyn Elizabeth Schoepp



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

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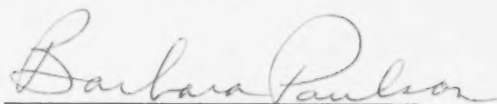
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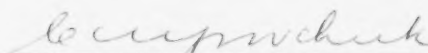
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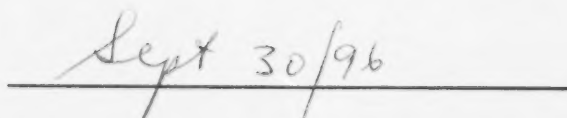
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Experience of an Adolescent Female in an Abusive Relationship submitted by Carolyn Elizabeth Schoepp in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.


Dr. Barbara Paulson


Dr. Carolyn Yewchuk


Dr. Andrea Borys


Sept 30/96

Dedication

To Cam, my friend, colleague and brother

Abstract

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to examine themes embodying the experience of adolescent females who became involved in relationships with abusive male partners between the ages of 13 and 16. Purposes of the study were to understand the abusive experience from the girls' viewpoint, to identify factors that predisposed them to abuse, as well as those factors that enabled them to leave the relationship. Vulnerability predisposes one to abuse, while isolation and powerlessness perpetuate the abusive relationship. Ambivalence represents conflicting thoughts and emotions that prevent one from escaping the abuse, thereby perpetuating the escalating cycle of abuse and violence. Connection and insight are forces that, when combined with catalyst emotions, can empower one to break free from the entrapment of an abusive relationship. These findings have implications for interrupting the cycle of abuse. They should be of interest to those involved in parenting, education, prevention and intervention.

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CHAPTER ONE: ASKING THE QUESTION

There is growing awareness of, and concern about, the high incidence of violence in Canadian society today. Domestic abuse, in particular, is recognized as a serious problem. Statistics show that 1,435 Canadian women were killed by their husbands or partners between 1974 and 1992 (Daly & Wilson, 1994). Since the seventies, interventions have largely centered on understanding and helping abused women and their children. More recently, efforts have also been directed toward rehabilitation of male batterers. Currently, the phenomenon of dating violence is very much in the spotlight and in the Canadian publication, Battered not Beaten, Linda MacLeod expresses concern over the rising numbers of battered teenage females seeking help from shelters (1987, p. 27). This concern is warranted since statistics reveal that approximately 100 females are killed by their male partners every year in Canada, (Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 1991b) and that adolescent females are at greatest risk of violent death at the hands of husbands and lovers (Daly & Wilson, 1994).

A comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of abusive adolescent relationships is lacking. The Office of Prevention of Family Violence (1984) challenges current empirical and theoretical approaches to domestic violence and states that "an integrative model of domestic violence must include components of social meaning" (p. 17). Contrary to the popular belief that individuals raised in abusive families are more likely to become victims of abuse, recent findings suggest that some females who become involved in abusive relationships did not grow up in violent homes (Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, 1991a). Although family background seems to be important in many cases, it appears that additional factors contribute significantly to teenage involvement in abusive relationships. These factors need to be identified and examined to provide greater understanding of the dynamics involved in such relationships. Since many abusive marriages begin as teenage romances (Bergman, 1992), increased knowledge could provide direction for educational and therapeutic strategies to interrupt the cycle of domestic abuse in the early stages.

In an attempt to develop a more comprehensive understanding of

social components of the cycle of domestic abuse the following study was undertaken. Open ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the present study to examine the experience of an abusive relationship from an adolescent's perspective. This present study asks the question, "What is the experience of an adolescent female involved in an intimate relationship with an abusive male partner?"

An adolescent's experience is different from that of an adult and is coloured by many factors including maturity, peer pressure, stages of development, family background, socialization and cultural expectations. Studies have identified the female in early adolescence as an extremely vulnerable individual and Gilligan and Mikel Brown summarize the major findings in the following statement:

For over a century the edge of adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for young women. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character. (1992, p. 2)

Younger girls, already at risk in a multitude of ways, may be more susceptible to abusive relationships than their older counterparts and it is crucial to recognize that both the development and the adult adjustment of females are profoundly hampered when they are abused as teens. In her extensive work with young abuse victims, Straus found that "violence in the lives of adolescents in all cases marks a significant disruption in normal development and has a dramatic interpersonal effect" (1994, p. 27).

Adolescent abuse is a serious societal problem in Canada today with far-reaching effects that are felt not only by the victim, but by those intimately involved with her. Many teens remain with abusive partners and raise children who are also exposed to abuse, hence continuing the cycle of violence in families. Therefore, an important and potentially powerful part of the solution to breaking the cycle of domestic abuse lies in understanding the dynamics of abusive, intimate relationships involving young females. In this study the qualitative method was chosen as an appropriate tool to understand the relationships examined from the perspective of these young women and

to delineate factors that predispose young females to abuse, to explore factors that keep them in abusive situations and those elements that enable them to leave an abusive relationship.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF PRESENT KNOWLEDGE

This chapter explores recent literature concerning abuse toward females by male partners, and the factors contributing to such abuse. Where relevant information on patterns of abuse in relationships involving adolescent females (13-16 years of age) is lacking, references are made to current knowledge of adult relationships.

Since adolescent females are developmentally immature, they experience relationships very differently than their adult counterparts. They generally lack knowledge of, and experience with, male/female relationships and, therefore, may tend to be idealistic in their expectations of perspective partners. Since their cognitive abilities are not fully developed, their reasoning and decision making skills are often immature. When reading this chapter it is important to keep these differences in mind, and to view references to adult relationships simply as springboards from which to begin to understand the adolescent experience.

Vulnerability of Early Adolescent Females

Emotional, physical and sexual abuse of young Canadian women is prevalent and unhealthy relationships continue despite violence towards female adolescents by their male partners (Carlson, 1987; O.P.F.V., 1991b). Many dating couples who experience abuse develop patterns of violence that are established even before marriage (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993). In order to explain why many young females enter and remain in abusive relationships, it is important to note that early adolescence has been identified as a time of increased vulnerability for females (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992; Orenstein, 1994). Pipher describes this phenomenon:

Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of adolescent girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle. In early adolescence, studies show that girls' IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and 'tomboyish'

personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies. (Pipher, 1994, p. 19)

Girls who appear to be happy and self confident in preadolescence begin to devalue their perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings in adolescence (Stern, 1990). This 'disavowing of self' seems to happen to all young women to some degree; yet no comprehensive explanation for its occurrence has yet been offered (Gilligan, Roger & Tolman, 1991). It appears that developmental stages, family background, peer group indoctrination and cultural norms all play a role in this mystical metamorphosis. The changelings that emerge are operating from "false selves" (Pipher, 1994) and are more vulnerable to many high risk situations, including involvement in abusive relationships (Pipher, 1994; Young Women's Christian Association, 1992).

Factors Contributing to Vulnerability

Girls today are entering puberty earlier than ever before. This rapid physical change actually slows down other aspects of their development (Pipher, 1994). Even though they may look mature, many teens are still operating at a very concrete level of thought, and may lack adequate decision making and reasoning skills to deal effectively with the complex issues involved in relationships. Despite their immaturity, many girls are dating and becoming involved in sexual relationships at a very early age, and MacLeod (1987) feels that the rise in the number of abused adolescents is directly linked to the increased involvement of teens in sexually intimate relationships (p. 28).

As Mitchell (1985) points out, the early adolescent displays much weaker skills when dealing with the opposite sex than her older counterpart. Mitchell goes on to stress that by middle adolescence, mental growth "permits coping strategies to become more systematic, thus activities are negotiated with greater premeditation and with more emphasis on outcomes" (p.138). It follows that the younger a girl is when she begins to date, the more vulnerable she may be to poor choices and possible abuse.

NiCarthy interviewed several females who had become involved with

older, abusive partners as teenagers. Dating an older male lent an aura of glamour to the relationship for the girl, but the age difference gave the abusive partner an extra edge of power (NiCarthy, 1987). Because of the huge developmental, physical and emotional gap between a young adolescent female and an older adolescent or adult male, such relationships are intrinsically out of balance. For this reason, a male who tends to be controlling is likely to choose a younger, more vulnerable partner; while a well adjusted adolescent male may prefer a partner who is closer to his age and level of maturity.

In summary, many factors set the stage for abusive relationships involving adolescent females. These include early puberty combined with immature cognitive development, power imbalances inherent in relationships involving adolescent girls with older males, and the early age at which many teenage girls begin to date and become sexually active.

The Importance of Relationships in Female Development

The interplay between self and others is a challenging dilemma central to lives of girls. Researchers have found that an inner sense of connection with others is a central organizing feature of women's development and that psychological crises in women's lives often stem from disconnections (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992). While males tend to define themselves in terms of individual accomplishments and autonomy, women usually find their identity within relationships (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992). As children, females are encouraged to function within the context of close relationships, while retaining their sense of individual identity. During early adolescence girls may feel that they have to choose between being themselves and being in relationship with others; and this may be creating a developmental crisis for them (Stern, 1991). Gilligan, Roger and Tolman describe how:

Adolescent girls enter a peculiar developmental crossroads where the path to maturity would involve separation, while the path to womanhood would require connection.... The problem of disavowing the self appears directly related to this dilemma - in fact, it may be an attempted solution. (1991, p. 113)

Many young women choose to disavow their true selves for the sake of pleasing others and remaining in relationship. However, their relationships may lack authenticity and balance because they are operating from false selves and, since they are unlikely to understand or pursue their own needs in a relationship, they may be at risk for abuse.

As previously mentioned, many girls are physically mature in early adolescence, although their social and cognitive skills are not generally well developed. Despite their naivete, they are commonly involved in intimate relationships for which they are not developmentally ready. Since relationships seem to be intrinsically important to young women, girls may be caught in a quandary between developing as an individual and investing in relationships with others. If they sacrifice their identities as individuals they will be unable to experience genuine relationships and, therefore, may be prone to abuse from their partners. This is a complex double bind for young women.

The Impact of Family Background

Straus (1994) found that violence in the family home has an extremely detrimental effect on one's development and that adolescents who have grown up with violence are unlikely to feel in control of their own lives. She explains that they have difficulty taking hold of their own lives since, as children, they saw little correlation between their actions and the response of others. Bowlby (1969) found that individuals who lack a secure and loving attachment as children are extremely vulnerable and can easily become overdependent; and Geller (1992) explains that violent fathers often produce children who believe that love and violence are interwoven. Pipher found that females abused as children "must rework the abuse when they are teenagers. They're all mixed up about love, sex, punishment and affection. They need to erase memories of bad relationships and build ideas about good ones. Otherwise they are at risk of finding boyfriends like the person who abused them" (1994, p. 229).

Other studies confirm that individuals who witness abuse as children are more likely to abuse or be a victim of abuse in the future, and that females from dysfunctional families are more susceptible to abusive relationships

(Carlson, 1990; Straus, 1994). Nine of the females NiCarthy interviewed were involved with abusive partners as teenagers. In her words:

Most of them lived in chaotic or abusive families and were eager for independence and hungry for love. They didn't realize that the partners they chose would demand more obedience and dependence than their parents had and would subject them to at least as much abuse. (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 297)

Females who grew up with violence may feel comfortable with a partner who mistreats them and may become involved in their dating relationships very quickly (O. P. F. V., 1991b). One would suppose that individuals who have grown up with positive role models for relationships would be more likely to recognize and reject unhealthy behavior before becoming absorbed in a relationship. However, while there is generally a connection between childhood abuse and being abused in intimate relationships, not all females abused by their partners were victims or witnesses of abuse as children, and some victims come from close, loving families (O.P.F.V., 1991a., p.1).

Often young women are overprotected by their families. This may be due partly to traditional ideas about male/female roles and partly to parents' awareness of increasing danger to females in our society. The pink blanket syndrome (Kennedy, 1995) refers to the tendency of well-meaning adults to help girls cope with difficulties by protecting, rather than empowering, them. Although such parents model loving relationships, they also give their daughters the message that females are inferior to males and need to be taken care of. These girls may have somewhat of a 'fairy tale' attitude towards relationships and may feel shocked and helpless when faced with abusive behavior. Daughters of loving, yet empowering parents will likely possess greater self-confidence and self-respect and, therefore, be less vulnerable to abuse.

It is difficult for many parents to understand and to support their daughters since the world of today's adolescent is very different from that of their parents. Because of this, parents often feel helpless to reach out to their daughters during adolescence, even though they see signs of

unhappiness and recognize this as an unsettling time for them. Even the most understanding parents are likely to be challenged by the difficulties their female children face during adolescence. Those parents who are able to maintain healthy communication with their daughters throughout adolescence will fortify them to withstand its immense pressures.

In summary, early family experiences have a powerful impact upon a young woman's self-esteem, self-confidence, degree of independence and knowledge of relationships. Those who grow up with abuse or neglect are unlikely to feel in charge of their lives, and may be overly dependent and lack knowledge of healthy relationships. When they are exposed to the first signs of abuse they may not recognize it as unhealthy behavior and may even tend to accept it, since they lack the inner resources to change their situations. On the other hand, young women who have experienced positive family relationships may be shocked by abusive behavior and may feel powerless in dealing with it. However, those who have been encouraged to see themselves as capable and equal to males may be less accepting of abusive behavior.

Cultural Factors

Peer Group Indoctrination

Pipher (1994) believes that teens today are faced with extreme demands from their peers, including the push to become involved in dating relationships in their early teens, and that they often find themselves involved in situations beyond their maturity. Just as they are dealing with many new challenges, they are also faced with intense pressure to separate from their parents. "They are under great social pressure to abandon their families, to be accepted by peer culture and to be autonomous individuals" (1994, p. 65). Many of them are already operating from "false selves" (Pipher, 1994) and they may tend to follow the crowd and pull away from their families. The more isolated they become from their parents, the less they may be able to keep the peer culture in perspective. When they disengage from their parents, "they give up the relationship they most need, the relationship with people who would protect them from girl-diminishing experiences" (Pipher, 1994, p. 67). Females from unhappy homes may be more vulnerable to abuse due to lack of family support; yet even those who have the support

of loving families are sometimes driven by social pressure to reject positive parental involvement in their lives. Fortunately, not all teens are equally vulnerable to peer pressure. Those who have interests outside of the peer group and who have managed to maintain a good relationship with their parents are less likely to depend on friends for all of their support.

Young women with little family connection are likely to see popularity with their peers as all important, and they may feel they have to have a boyfriend to be fully accepted. Sometimes the need for acceptance is so great that any boyfriend will do, so having an abusive boyfriend is better than having no boyfriend (Lewis, 1987). In their efforts to become independent they may find themselves replacing parental guidance with the control and manipulation of an abusive partner. Often parents are disturbed by the influences of the peer group and their daughters' relationships. However, they may be powerless to protect their daughters from "girl-destructive environments. ... They are hindered in their efforts to help their daughters by the messages that our culture sends young women and by our ethic that to grow up one must break free from parents, even loving parents" (Pipher, 1994, p. 81).

Sex Role Stereotypes

In addition to the demands of the peer group, adolescent experiences are influenced by the norms of the larger culture. Young women are still exposed to sexist attitudes and behaviours, and gender-based constraints on opportunities. Although the women's movement has made progress by improving conditions for women in our society, "prescribed gender roles by which males dominate and females submit and nurture" flourish, particularly in the media (Geller, 1992, p. 14). These roles perpetuate:

the image of self-sacrifice or self-silencing and the holding out of purity and perfection, as conditions for relationship and the mark of a good woman, in the case of the feminine ideal, and, in the case of the masculine ideal, of self-aggrandizement and the desire to be in the dominant position, to be in control. (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992, p. 30)

Orenstein (1994, p. xxiii) describes how "at adolescence, at the moment

of transformation from girlhood to womanhood, (females) learn in a new and profound way that boys are still central in every aspect of the culture." For young women, a most damaging cultural phenomenon is the imbalance of male/female power that allows males to control, manipulate and exploit females (Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992). This male/female power imbalance is reflected in the media, school, workplace, church and home. Unfortunately, females seem to largely accept, rather than challenge, many of the traditional sex role stereotypes. Miller (1991) has identified a phenomenon where girls believe they are not supposed to utilize their powers in all ways, since to do so would be wrong and shameful. This idea becomes much stronger in adolescence when females do not want to appear more capable than their male counterparts and so they are willing to compromise their very selves for the sake of relationship.

An examination of the traditional roles of males and females in intimate relationships led MacLeod (1987) to conclude that abusive relationships may not be so different from 'normal' ones in our society. She suggests that abuse is simply an extreme manifestation of characteristics of most sexual relationships in our society and that battering is a "caricature of our ideal of romantic love with its emphasis on intensity, isolation and total mental and physical possession and obsession" (p. 12). Teens often interpret abuse as an indication of love, especially if it is seen as a sign of jealousy or possessiveness (O.P.F.V., 1991b). They tend to make excuses for unacceptable behavior or blame themselves for causing their partner's anger. Lewis found that young women find it very difficult to "assert their needs no matter how hurt or humiliated they are by being forced or coerced into sexual acts" (1987, p.4). She believes this is because "in our culture, sex is seen as something men 'take' and women 'give'" (1987, p. 4).

Impact of the Media

The media plays a huge role in perpetuating messages that are both confusing and dis-empowering for girls. In music, advertisements and magazines, females are objectified and degraded one minute, and treated like fragile princesses the next. The romantic ideal, commonly the theme of movies and books, maintains the idea that love conquers all and this

perception is so strong that many young women remain trapped in abusive love relationships, believing that anything wrong in a relationship can be fixed with more love (Adams, Fay & Loreen-Martin, 1984). Girls are caught in the cross fire of mixed sexual messages. They are constantly exposed to brutal and callous models of sexuality, yet "sex is considered both a sacred act between two people united by God and the best way to sell suntan lotion" (Pipher, 1995, p. 71). "We raise our daughters to be whole people and the media reduces them to bodies" (Pipher, 1995, p. 206). Teens from all family backgrounds are continually bombarded with perplexing, yet persuasive messages from a "girl-poisoning culture" (Pipher, 1995, p. 252).

Responsibility for Relationship

Cultural norms dictate it is the woman's responsibility to give up power for the sake of relationships (Baker Miller, 1991; Gilligan & Mikel Brown, 1992). Females in abusive relationships, conditioned to the traditional nurturing role of the woman, may believe it is up to them to 'fix' the relationship, and will often remain with violent partners hoping that their love will change them. NiCarthy found that:

Although many partners tried to dominate (their female partners) by requests or demands that they confine themselves to household tasks, drop out of school or quit work, the women tried to please the partners and didn't recognize these attempts to isolate them as omens of potential control, which would later be backed up by threats and abuse. (1987, p. 295)

She goes on to say:

Many [of them] had no experience that would alert them to the dangers of their partners' efforts to control them, especially when these efforts were disguised as loving protection. Most women either ignored them or shrugged them away. In some instances they allowed their partners to explain that an angry outburst or unreasonable demand was 'only because of stress... or alcohol... or an unhappy childhood or... sometimes the abusive partner persuaded the woman that it was her fault, or she blamed herself for being too thoughtless or too selfish.

(NiCarthy, 1987, p. 295)

Individuals who grew up with violence may be more likely to overlook signs of abuse, since such signs may seem more 'normal' to them, while young women who didn't grow up with violence may not wish to perceive themselves as abused and may cover up the abuse (O.P.F.V., 1991a, p. 29).

NiCarthy cites an example of such denial from her recent study:

When George got drunk at a party and smashed a window, Madlyn comforted herself that he hadn't hit her. When she learned that he had beaten his first wife she was sure it didn't matter because she would never "run around on him." Like many other women she assumed his treatment of his first wife was brought about by the wife's behavior, and that it would never happen to her. (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 295)

Similarly, teens may tend to overlook or excuse controlling or manipulative behavior in their boyfriends and there may be more of a tendency for denial if denial was a pattern in one's own family.

Some females believe they can rescue their partners. The desire to rescue is especially appealing if the partner had had a difficult childhood, had been left by other women, was unemployed or vulnerable because of personal or societal mistreatment (NiCarthy, 1987). Teenage girls, with their idealistic visions, may be particularly vulnerable to this 'rescuer' complex.

In summary, traditional sex role stereotypes and conflicting messages of the peer group and the media contribute to the confusion and vulnerability of the adolescent female. Many young women today are exposed to some form of abuse at some time; and those who are unfortunate enough to become involved in an ongoing, abusive relationship may find it difficult to leave. They may be influenced by the romantic ideal and may have internalized the belief that women are largely responsible for the success of relationships. They may accept a power imbalance in a relationship as normal and, thus, be susceptible to abuse.

Dynamics of Abusive Relationships

A study conducted by the Young Women's Christian Association

describes an abuse victim as someone who "minimizes the abuse, is isolated, exhibits 'learned' helplessness, internalizes blame, is ambivalent, believes she is inferior and deserves to be treated badly, and hopes things will get better" (1992, p. 79). Caplan lists factors which prevent a woman from leaving an abusive relationship, including shock, guilt, depression, shame, humiliation, and low self-esteem (1985, p. 29). Some of the reasons young women stay with abusive dating partners appear to be similar to the reasons wives stay with abusive husbands. These may include: number of physical injuries, severity and frequency of physical violence, length of relationship and degree of intimacy, hope that the partner will reform, feelings of love or sorrow for him and perceived lack of alternatives (Lewis, 1987, p. 5). Lewis (1987) interviewed ten young women, age thirteen to twenty years of age, regarding their experiences in violent dating relationships. She identified several common themes including isolation, lack of information, sexual force and coercion, mental abuse and self-blame.

Among the most typical feelings of victims of abuse are fear, anxiety, hurt, powerlessness, confusion and hopelessness; however fear is the most invasive and damaging. "To deal with ever present fear, many deny the horror of the violence and threats, and minimize their need for safety" (Y.W.C.A., 1992, p. 76). Young women in abusive relationships may be deliberately estranged from their family and friends by their boyfriends, making it difficult for them to access information and support (Y.W.C.A., 1992). Isolation contributes to the powerlessness that traps females in abusive relationships. "The core experiences of both victims and offenders are disempowerment and disconnection from others" (Herman, 1992). As one young woman interviewed by Lewis stated, "I needed mainly to understand what was happening to me" (1987, p. 6).

For younger women, there is even more fear that their parents or friends will condemn them for having become involved in the relationship and for staying under conditions of abuse. A young woman who has become involved with a man her parents dislike and criticize is unlikely to confide in them when the relationship becomes abusive, and if she has become

estranged from her friends, she will not be able to rely on them for support either. (Lewis, 1987, p. 6)

As the girl's fear and shame increase so does the isolation, and this makes it easier for the abuser to control her.

Abused girls "often have low self-esteem and tend to suffer high levels of emotional distress, although it is unclear whether these factors are always in place prior to the abuse or whether they wholly or partly result from the abuse" (Comins, 1984, p.5). A young woman may already see herself as inferior and when she is first abused this may act to confirm her suspicion that something is wrong with her (Y.W.C.A., 1992). Young women with low self-esteem are more easily influenced by others and may tend to be compliant to their boyfriends' abusive demands (A.C.W.S., 1988, p. 12). Regardless of one's sense of self entering a relationship, repeated abuse and victimization always results in a battered self-esteem (Y.W.C.A., 1992).

Straus explains how violence can cause one to repress or even dissociate from one's feelings:

Psychic numbing occurs for some adolescents after an overwhelming trauma and involves the experience of having one's emotions deadened and becoming physically disconnected from one's body. Unfortunately, adolescents are not necessarily able to control when they dissociate, and any stress that resembles the original trauma can bring it on. When this happens, it becomes more difficult for adolescents to assess a perceived threat realistically, or to develop other, more effective skills to protect themselves. (1994, p. 12)

The more separated one becomes from one's own feelings, the more helpless one becomes.

Models and Theories Regarding Abusive Relationships

There are several theories which attempt to explain the dynamics of abusive intimate relationships and why victims remain in them. These include the model of relative cost and benefits, Walker's cycle of violence, the psychological entrapment model, the theory of learned helplessness, and the theories of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic bonding.

According to Pfouts (1978), women in abusive relationships weigh the costs and benefits of staying or leaving, and when costs are greater than rewards in both the current and alternative relationships the typical coping behavior is the 'self-punishing response' of staying in the relationship. Conversely, if perceived rewards or alternatives to the relationship outweigh the costs, the victim is more likely to leave.

Lenore Walker (1979) found an identifiable pattern to domestic violence consisting of three stages: the tension building stage, the explosion, and the remorse or honeymoon stage. The remorse of the abusive partner in the honeymoon stage often convinces the victim, hoping for change, to reconcile with him. The tension builds until the next violent episode, often more severe than the last, and the cycle of violence continues.

The psychological entrapment model reflects the traditional view of the woman as being responsible to make the relationship work. "The more time and effort the woman invests, the harder it becomes to give up without success, and the less likely that an abused woman will leave the relationship" (Strube & Barbour, 1984, p. 11).

Walker (1979) and Seligman (1991) found that learned helplessness was characteristic of abused females. "Classic learned helplessness occurs [when] individuals blame themselves for their negative outcomes and expect them to persist over time, and to extend into other domains of their lives" (Walker, p. 12). This view suggests that individuals who blame themselves for their situations would be more likely to remain in abusive relationships.

Similarly, one of the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, of which the battered woman syndrome is a subcategory, can be the belief that victims are powerless to change their situation:

Continuous and unpredictable traumatic events such as battering can result in the development of coping mechanisms to deal with the trauma rather than developing strategies to escape the traumatic situation because of the belief, real or perceived, that nothing they or anyone can do will change their situation. The belief that they cannot change their situation develops as a result of women learning from experience that

they cannot predict the effect their behavior will have on the batterer and/or that actual defence is impossible. In order to minimize harm, then, various coping skills are employed with women more likely to choose behaviours that will result in known and/or familiar outcomes having a high probability of protecting them, rather than responses that result in an unknown outcome, like escape. (Geller, 1992, p. 15)

Traumatic bonding can occur between a battered female and her abuser when a power imbalance is combined with intermittent abuse. In between mistreatment are times of normal and pleasant behavior (Dutton and Painter, 1993). "The repeated experience of terror and reprieve, especially within the isolated context of a love relationship, may result in a feeling of intense, almost worshipful dependence upon an all-powerful, godlike authority" (Herman, 1992, p. 92).

Once young women become enmeshed in an unhealthy relationship, fear, helplessness and isolation can entrap them. As outlined, several theories help to explain this entrapment by examining factors such as the degree of learned helplessness of the victim, the amount of investment in the relationship, the perceived costs and benefits of leaving and staying, the cyclical nature of an abusive relationship and the traumatic effects of intermittent abuse.

Rationale for the Present Study

I believe that all of the ideas presented in this chapter have value in helping to explain why young females become involved and remain with abusive partners, particularly when the ideas are viewed in the larger context of the female desire to remain in relationship with others. As previously mentioned, society's traditional perception of females as largely responsible for relationships is an important factor which may keep a female in an unhealthy liaison. This view may set young women up to become compliant victims of abuse, since they may be quick to overlook abusive behavior or even regard it as a sign of love. Idealistic belief in the romantic ideal may cause them to think that they can change a relationship by being more loving and submissive. Therefore, a key factor pertaining to all of theories discussed

may be an inclination for females to see relationships with others as more important than their own self fulfilment, and themselves as primarily responsible for maintaining such relationships. This perspective may shed greater light on the perplexing question of why girls and women are hesitant to leave seemingly intolerable relationships.

Females are vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons. These include their physical size and strength compared to males, their role in giving birth and in caring for children, their generally low earning power compared to that of males and our society's historically patriarchal structure with its rigid sex-role stereotypes. For teenage girls these factors are accompanied by conflicting messages regarding their roles that they receive from parents, peers, the media and society in general, as they struggle to develop their own identities. If they come from unhappy homes and have experienced abuse as youngsters, their susceptibility to mistreatment may be intensified.

Violence is harmful to all victims, but the effects on teens may be particularly severe and may include arrested development and debilitating effects on self-esteem and adult coping skills. The purpose of the present study is to understand the experience of an abusive relationship from the viewpoint of the teenage participants. Findings will be of interest to parents and individuals and organizations involved in education, intervention, prevention and treatment. Hopefully knowledge gained will increase present understanding of abused teenage girls and provide direction for strategies to interrupt the cycle of abuse.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research "produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Corbin & Straus, 1992, p. 17). Such inquiry is particularly suited to attempts to uncover the nature of people's experiences with a lived phenomenon (Biklen & Bogdan, 1992, p. 19). It focuses not just on behavior, but on what people experience in the natural setting and how they understand that which they experience.

Basic to the qualitative approach of phenomenology are the assumptions that "human experience is mediated by interpretation" and that "objects, people, situations and events do not possess their own meaning, rather, it is conferred on them" (Biklen & Bogdan, 1992, p. 35, 36).

Phenomenological research asks the question, "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). In this approach, inductive analysis leads to the discovery of shared experiences or themes that emerge as the investigator interacts with the subjects. By examining various individuals' descriptions of a phenomenon and identifying their common experiences, researchers attempt to determine the essence and meaning of that particular phenomenon for those individuals. "The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer's assumption that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study" (Patton, 1990, p. 70).

Phenomenology requires a high degree of involvement between researcher and participant and allows for creative exploration and discovery. It is an appropriate tool for examining experiences of abused adolescents, since it is likely to yield a much more comprehensive understanding of human experience and behavior than would be possible with an experimental design (Louis, 1982). The emergent nature of this type of research allows for flexibility to reformulate data as research progresses and leads to greater authenticity regarding human experience (Borman, LeCompte & Goetz, 1986). It can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind a little studied phenomenon, to give fresh perspective on a well researched topic and to convey intricate details that are difficult to express through quantitative means (Corbin & Straus, 1992, p. 19). In Colaizzi's words,

"Phenomenological research is a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself" (1978, p. 52).

Bracketing Prior Knowledge

My interest in the phenomenon of abusive adolescent relationships stems from professional and personal sources. Professionally, in my role as educator, counsellor, women's group facilitator and community volunteer, I have encountered many girls and women who become involved in relationships that are detrimental and dangerous to them and their children. As a former board member of a group dedicated to the prevention of family violence, I am well-informed concerning the dynamics of domestic abuse and its effects upon the family. In my studies I strive to be familiar with current research and literature within the field.

Personally, I have experienced an abusive relationship as a young woman. My first marriage resulted from a high school relationship with a young man who was emotionally abusive during our courtship. Despite the abuse, I married him and remained in a very unhappy marriage for five years. I am still amazed that loyalty, guilt, religious beliefs, lack of outside support and societal stigma were all factors that contributed to me remaining in an abusive relationship. When I did leave, the main impetus was my concern for the future of my children, rather than myself, and this is a pattern I see in other women. Since my own experience is the genesis for my interest in this phenomenon, it is important that I identify my personal experiences and resulting biases and separate them from my interpretation of the data.

My Personal Beliefs

I feel that, in today's society, young people receive conflicting messages regarding sex roles, social skills and the acceptability of violence and, therefore, have no clear direction to guide them in relationships. Teenage girls may equate jealousy and possessiveness with love and may make excuses for their partners' unacceptable behavior. I suspect that younger females are more likely to become involved in abusive relationships than their older counterparts and I am interested in exploring their experiences. In my view, the breakdown of the extended family and the segregation of

adolescents from the larger culture are factors that isolate young people in Canadian society. I feel that isolation is usually present in abusive relationships, and that females with little family and community support will be more vulnerable to abuse than those with supportive families and close ties to the community.

In my opinion abusive adolescent relationships are prevalent because many young Canadians, both male and female, are confused and lack adequate knowledge and experience to make informed choices regarding relationships. They are highly influenced by the media and their friends, and are often isolated from the very adults who should be important in their lives. I believe that young women remain in unhappy relationships due to factors such as length of relationship, feelings of loyalty and degree of intimacy experienced. Since their parents may not approve of their choice of partners, they may be hesitant to talk with them about problems and feelings regarding their relationships. They may perceive that they have very few alternatives and that any relationship is better than none.

I expect to find a power imbalance in the relationships studied, partly because they have been described as abusive, and partly because of substantial age differences between the females and their partners. In adolescence such age differences are particularly important since the younger partner in a relationship is likely to be significantly less mature in overall development than the older partner. Males who tend to be controlling may choose younger, more vulnerable partners who are likely to look up to them and comply with their wishes and demands. Young teens may find older males particularly attractive and because of the gap between their degree of development and maturity and that of their older boyfriends, they may be very easily intimidated and controlled.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the term 'intimate' indicates that the partners either lived together and/or were sexual partners. An abusive relationship is defined as one in which the female partner experienced at least two forms of abuse as described below:

Physical abuse may include pushing, slapping, kicking, biting,

punching, hair pulling, burning, striking with an object, twisting limbs, choking, beating or using a weapon. Psychological abuse may include frightening, pressuring, threatening, manipulating, name calling, humiliating, isolating from friends and family and other forms of extreme possessiveness. Sexual abuse may include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts. (Office for the Prevention of Family violence, 1991, p.1)

Participants

Four of the interviewees were Caucasian and one was Metis. One of the young women dated her partner but never lived with him, while four of them lived with their partners. Two of the young women eventually married their abusive partners and had children. The females were all attending school when they first entered the relationships. Their ages ranged from 13 to 16 and the age differential between them and their partners varied from one and a half to five years, with the average difference being two years. The relationships lasted from eight months to five years with two years being the average. At the time of the interviews one woman was separated from her abusive husband as he was in jail, two were no longer with their abusive partners and two were still in the abusive relationships. When discussing their experiences I have used pseudonyms and eliminated identifying details to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants.

Procedures

In order to explore the question, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five females who became involved in abusive relationships as teens. They were solicited through a written description of the proposed study sent to community agencies such as the R.C.M.P. and the schools (Appendix D). The purposes, procedures and benefits of the study were thoroughly explained to all participants (Appendix C). They were asked to sign a form stating that they understood the requirements for the project and consented to take part in the study (Appendix A). If they were under 18 at the time of the interviews the girls'

parents were also required to give written consent (Appendix B). Appendix E contains a schedule of questions used to guide the interviews.

I met with each participant four times. During the first meeting, we got to know each other and discussed goals, expectations and procedures. During the second meeting I interviewed each participants to develop an understanding of her experience. The research question asked was: "What is your experience as female adolescent involved in an intimate relationship with an abusive male partner?" The participants described their experiences in the relationship being examined and I asked questions necessary to clarify their statements. The second interviews were tape recorded and interview data was transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity of participants. The tapes were erased at the conclusion of the study.

After reading and rereading each transcript to form a general impression of the participant's experience, I used the hermeneutic process of reduction to extract meaning from the interview transcripts. I chose statements that directly pertained to the girl's experience in the relationship and I reworded these statements to reflect my understanding of their essential meaning. During this procedure, which was repeated for each of the transcripts, I began to recognize the emergence of themes representing the essence of the statements and I labelled them accordingly. This procedure, a within-persons analysis, was repeated for all of the interviews.

When I had analyzed each of the transcripts in this way I completed an "across-person analysis" by clustering common statements, paraphrases and themes for all participants. The themes were then referred back to the original manuscripts to ensure their validity (Table 4-1). During the third and fourth meetings, I shared the themes I had discovered with the participants. They responded very positively to the analysis and felt that these themes accurately represented their own experiences. Their feedback helped to substantiate my observations and interpretations, and my data were revised and expanded as a result of it. From this analysis came a written synthesis of the common themes experienced by the young women and a maze model depicting the themes of a typical abusive relationship involving an adolescent female.

Summary

The goal of the present study is to understand the experience of an abused adolescent female using phenomenological research methods. My participants were five young women who became involved in abusive relationships as teenagers. I have identified the reasons for my interest in this phenomenon, my personal beliefs and biases, and the definitions and procedures used.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE THEMES

Eight predominant themes and several sub themes were identified through composite analysis of the data and they are outlined in Table 4-1. The experience of being in an abusive relationship is a complex one consisting of three overlapping stages. Entering, experiencing and finally leaving an abusive relationship is a complicated, dynamic process, as opposed to a simple linear progression, and is unique for each individual.

Throughout this chapter, excerpts from interviews with the participants are quoted to illustrate their thoughts and feelings regarding the relationships within the context of each theme. Vulnerability is the theme that best represents the stage of entering an abusive relationship, while isolation, powerlessness and entrapment most aptly portray the experience of living with abuse. Ambivalence provides the impetus for change, and when combined with acknowledgement and connection can lead to empowerment and eventual escape from abuse.

Becoming Involved in an Abusive Relationship

Vulnerability

Participants were asked, "Why did you become involved in an abusive relationship?" Their answers were vague and suggested that many factors, including age and immaturity, family background, cultural and peer influences, lack of knowledge and experience and low self-esteem contributed to their vulnerability. Only one of the five participants had been previously involved in a serious relationship and since the others were lacking in experience, they were unable to recognize subtle differences between abusive and healthy behaviour.

Sandy's statement, "That was my first serious relationship. What is a healthy relationship?" reflect this naivete and uncertainty about relationships. Lack of knowledge and experience made these young women especially susceptible to abuse. Vicki explained that she "didn't know much about relationships and that kind of stuff. I haven't had that many. I'd like to have lots."

Table 4-1

Themes of Adolescents' Experiences in Abusive Relationships

Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptors
1. Becoming Involved in an Abusive Relationship	
1. Vulnerability	Lacks knowledge and experience, is easily influenced by others, gains her own identity through others, blames self for partner's behavior, complies in order to belong, needs someone to lean on, is afraid of being on her own, fears the reactions of others
2. Living with Abuse	
2. Isolation	Feels cut off from family, friends and community, feels unsupported, rejected and left out, feels that she's missing out on things, is not in touch with her own feelings, wants and needs, contributes to her own isolation due to fear and intimidation
3. Powerlessness	Feels like a possession, feels rejected, feels used, allows partner to control her, complies to please partner, complies to prevent conflict, believes her feelings don't matter to partner, lacks voice in the relationship
4. Entrapment	Feels that she is unable to leave, is overwhelmed by difficulties, blames self for partner's behavior, feels entrapped, feels she has no alternatives

Table 4-1

Themes of Adolescents' Experiences in Abusive Relationships

Thematic Clusters

Generalized Descriptors

Leaving the Abusive Relationship

5. Ambivalence

Feels torn in many aspects of her experience: between expressing her true feelings and avoiding conflict, between the mixed messages conveyed by his loving behavior one minute and his abusive behavior the next, between her fear of staying and her fear of change

6. Acknowledgement

Experiences growing resentment, is shocked by his behavior, feels that she has missed out, is gaining insight into patterns which affect her behavior

7. Connection

Compares her situation to that of others, is becoming aware of alternatives to her present situation, and of other resources that are available to her,

8. Empowerment

Is becoming more in control, is aware of and expresses her feelings and needs, is becoming more autonomous, has a desire for growth.

Sandy's next statement also illustrates lack of awareness, "His dad was physically abusive to him and at that time I didn't realize that the abuse went in a cycle." Joan described her reaction to her partner's early possessive behavior, "I didn't think anything of it. I thought that's the way guys are."

All of the relationships in the present study involved an older male and a younger female; and this age differential may have contributed to a power imbalance between the partners since the females were emotionally and cognitively immature compared to their partners. Vicki describes how she "always wondered what he expected from me." She felt that she had to compete with his previous girlfriends which, in part, meant sexual involvement that she was not ready for. "Since his other girlfriends were older they would do more things. I was only thirteen when we met."

Acceptance of abuse may be influenced by seeing or experiencing abuse at home. Two of the participants admitted to witnessing physical and emotional abuse of their mothers by their mothers' partners, while two of the participants stated that their mothers had been subjected to emotional, but not physical abuse. Tina felt that there was no abuse between her parents, but stated that drug and alcohol abuse were common in her extended family.

Generally, the young women lacked role models of healthy, intimate relationships and this likely contributed to poor choices of boyfriends. Tina explained that she became involved with her partner partly because of problems in her family. She stated, "I thought I didn't like it at home. Me and my parents weren't getting along. My sister and my brother in law weren't getting along. My brother and me weren't getting along." Vicki felt that her acceptance of abusive behavior had been influenced by her parents' relationship. She stated, "I guess that's true because they say you pick someone like your dad, and my Mom does whatever my Dad wants."

Anne described her mother's relationship with an abusive boyfriend, "But it wasn't really truly physical. I never saw him hit her, but it was more or less mental, like forcing her to open the door or he was going to break it down." She downplayed the abuse which eventually escalated and became life threatening to her mother. Since she had witnessed severe abuse in her home, she may have been more accepting of abuse in her personal relationships. Interestingly, all of the young women reported that their abusive partners had been physically abused by their fathers as children and adolescents.

Two of the participants clearly saw an older boyfriend as a status

symbol, giving them increased esteem with their peers. Tina explained, "I was happy 'cause I thought my friends would be jealous because I'm moving in with a guy and I'm getting married." Vicki remarked, "It felt kind of good that someone older liked me, cause he is five years older than me." Along with the importance of having a boyfriend to impress one's peers goes a push to separate from and even rebel against one's parents. Vicki's parents disapproved of her relationship with an older male. However she recalls that, "The more they didn't want it the more I would. It was kind of exciting, I guess. But it was also sort of bad, having to sneak around and lie if I wanted to see him and stuff."

Vicki's comments reflect her vulnerability to influence from others, "It seems like there's a stage you go through where friends are really important, more important than parents or other things" and "you're sort of trapped by a decision that you made when you were thirteen." She recalled, "Well, when I was thirteen I would go out with anyone who asked me. Back then I would do what people wanted me to do. If someone said, 'Have a smoke,' I would have a smoke. I would want to fit in."

The young women appeared to be overly concerned about the approval and happiness of others, while ignoring negative consequences to their own health and happiness. They appeared to lack a separate sense of self and seemed to define their self-worth in terms of their usefulness to and their ability to please others. For example, Sandy said that she dated her partner because she felt sorry for him due to the abuse he experienced at home. Later when she wanted to leave him she stayed for fear of being blamed for his suicide. "At that point I thought he would (commit suicide) and I didn't want to be the one to be blamed for that. His parents didn't like me and I knew for sure the blame would fall upon me." She thought she could rescue him from his depression and his financial problems. "He was never good with money. He bought a trailer and I knew he had got himself in debt so I moved in with him, he asked me to." She was willing to change her life to meet his needs, while overlooking the negative consequences to her own wellbeing. Sandy eventually became entrapped by the very person she set out to rescue!

Sandy described her dilemma, "I tried breaking up with him but he was

very persistent. He told me if I left he would commit suicide. I guess I stayed out of fear of him killing himself." Like Sandy other participants who tried to end an unsatisfying relationship often felt pressured to continue it. In Vicki's case, she felt responsible for how her actions would affect her partner's behavior, "I guess I worry about him because last time we broke up he started drinking alot." The more vulnerable the female is, the more likely she will succumb to such manipulative tactics.

When Sandy became aware of her partner's abusive behavior, she made excuses for it. "I noticed right away that he didn't like me to have much to do with my friends and I thought maybe ... just starting out, just trying to be together, to get to know each other." When Anne's partner became angry she rationalized, "But I don't think that he'd like, intentionally hurt me. But then I guess that's what everybody thinks." This tendency to downplay signs of dysfunction was the beginning of the disconnection from self and others that resulted as the abuse escalated.

Living with Abuse

Isolation, powerlessness and entrapment are the themes experienced by the young women when they were most deeply involved in the abusive relationships. This was a very difficult time for the girls and their words convey their hardship in a very powerful manner.

Isolation

Isolation was a prevailing theme in the experiences of all participants as they became more cut off from family, friends and community by their partners' abusive behavior, their own reactions to that behavior and the responses of family, friends and professionals to their situations. Isolation was achieved through verbal put-downs, threats, physical violence and sexual abuse. The women were treated as possessions and such behavior instilled fear, eroded self-esteem and effectively separated them from outside influence and support. The more isolated the victims became, the greater became the power of the abuser. Isolation was experienced in several ways including the feeling of being possessed or owned, disconnection from family, friends and community and loss of self.

Living as Another's Possession

All of the male partners demonstrated excessive possessiveness toward their girlfriends. Vicki said he tried to control her so much that she "felt like he owned me." Anne explained:

In his mind he thinks that everybody is looking at me or something. Yeah, and they're not even looking at me. It's just like, I don't know, his imagination or something because I never see them looking at me. He always wants to know what I'm doing, where I'm going, who I'm talking to. He'll get mad at me if I'm with my friends, or if I'm skipping, he thinks I should be with him instead of my friends. So if I see him I'll duck. It's a natural reaction, like, 'Oh no, there he is!'

She continued, "He wants me to call him everywhere I go. He thinks I'm going to cheat on him or something. I tell him that I wouldn't all the time, but he just doesn't trust me." She summed up her feelings of confinement, "And now it's to the point where he doesn't let me do anything. Similarly, Tina described her mate's increasing possessive behavior:

It was just gradual. It started when he was going to jail, when we first moved in together he had to go to jail on the weekends, and he would always phone me every hour from jail, and if I didn't want to talk to him then he thought I was with some other guy.

When she tried to attend school her partner was paranoid that she would associate with other males. "He made me carry his beeper. And then he told me that I couldn't go to school because there were other guys there and I would talk to them or they would talk to me." Finally she quit school when the pressure increased.

Sandy was terrified whenever she recognized the jealous anger in her partner's eyes. "He could hide it from others, but like his eyes would change, and I knew. I would just sit there and I wouldn't even put my head up." She would buy time by having others around, "Lots of times I would invite people home just so that I'd be safe."

When she experienced a breakdown, Tina never got a chance to talk

to anyone in the hospital about her situation, because her partner was with her constantly. "He was always standing right there. He wouldn't leave. It felt even worse 'cause I wanted to talk to somebody but I couldn't because he wouldn't leave me alone. He was right there."

Sandy worked at a gas station and she recalled her partner's frequent surveillance, "He would stand there at night and watch me." She spoke further about her partner's distrust of her:

I wasn't allowed to walk because I might have been busy with some 'fella' on the other side of the trailer court where he couldn't see me. And he always accused me of being with the people I worked with sexually. If I tried to deny it he would get rough.

Threats were commonly used to control the young women's behavior. Once when Anne became ill at a party and asked her partner to drive her home he replied, "If you go home, it's over." Tina's partner told her that if she left he would kill himself or her. Once he broke beer bottles at her feet to scare her. For Sandy, in particular, threats were a major form of intimidation holding her in the relationship. When they were first dating, her partner threatened to take his life if she should break up with him.

After they moved in together, the threats continued. "He was always threatening, he would say, 'If you leave I'll hunt you down wherever you are. You know he's capable of shooting a gun. Is he going to literally hunt me down?'" Sandy wondered, "The threats were so real would he have done it?" Later, her partner used coercion to convince her to marry him. "When my oldest daughter was born, we weren't married yet, and he threatened me and told me that she had to be registered in his name. And the only reason why I got married was so my name was the same as hers."

Twice he shot at Sandy to intimidate her. "Being so close and not doing it (hitting her), that was to scare me." She described the terror she felt when he shot at her:

One time we were out hunting, he was mad at me and he shot at me, there's no denying in my mind, when you're standing there and you hear a trigger and the roar of a gun you hit the dirt.

Yeah, I stayed because of the fear. I mean he was capable of trying anything.

Living in Isolation

Participants experienced a great deal of loneliness and unhappiness since they were cut off from family and friends. Joan explained, I wasn't allowed to be with my friends so I had to stay home when he went out. If I went with him he got mad when I talked to his friends." Anne described her frustration, "It's just I don't go with my friends anymore. I used to go all the time and I could do whatever I wanted. I'd go out and have fun."

Tina also talked about her isolation from others:

And he didn't like any of my friends. The only person I hung around with was my cousin. Well, he wouldn't let me talk to anyone. When my mom phoned he would sit right there. And I never talked to any of my friends. I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, I had to stay home.

Sandy said, "I couldn't have friends, like he wouldn't even let me see his cousins who live across the street." Vicki recalled, "He doesn't like me to go out cause he hates my friends."

Tina had a friend who tried to talk to her about leaving the relationship and even offered to help her, but after a while he gave up on Tina because she refused to leave:

And then, finally, he just gave up on me. That felt really bad. It felt like nobody cared so why should I leave? Then I was scared 'cause if I did want to leave I didn't have anybody to help me.

Sandy recalled, "Like he isolated me from friends, from my family. I don't even know my brothers anymore." Tina remembered how she felt cut off from her dad, "My dad never came over. I felt like he didn't care, he just gave up on me." She longed "to hear him say that he cared about me and what was going on." Sandy spoke about her brother's silence about her situation, "He never said anything, none of them did." When she had thought about leaving she felt, "I can't go to my brother's and say, 'I have these babies here;' he's got two boys of his own. I felt like I would be imposing."

Tina described her dilemma when she had the courage to leave, but didn't find the family support she needed:

There was a time (the night that he took all those pills) when I packed a suitcase and I told my cousin, 'Don't tell him that I left,' and I took off with the car and I went out to my Mom's, but me and her got into a fight, so I just went back.

The apparent indifference of the victim's families to their plights only helped to increase the isolation they were experiencing.

At times community agencies became involved with the young women, either because they had reached out for help or a crisis situation had forced involvement, but unfortunately the issue of abuse was frequently overlooked and the women often became even more isolated due to the lack of understanding and caring they encountered. When Tina ended up in the hospital because of severe anxiety, nobody looked for the cause of that anxiety, "Yeah, but they would always let me go. They just gave me drugs and told me to go home."

During the early months of her relationship Sandy reached out to various professionals in the community:

I tried talking to the counsellor at the high school and I never got anywhere. He just said, 'Things can change. We'll be around to help you.' And with the doctor, I just felt that it was going nowhere. He seemed more concerned about my relationship with my dad.

It seemed that professionals were unaware of, or unwilling to deal with the issue of possible abuse or violence. Later when she tried to leave her abusive marriage, Sandy was unable to get financial support from social services and protection from the police:

Social Services couldn't give me money for a damage deposit. I really felt that everybody shut the door in my face. And at that time I felt with the police not being able to help before, would they be there for me now? I knew he was going to become abusive and I went back to Legal Aid and they turned me down. I wanted a restraining order. The R.C.M.P. said, 'Well if he comes

back just phone.' What am I supposed to do?

When Sandy saw the doctor because she had been physically abused, he did not discuss the abuse with her. "And then when he came home he shoulder checked me and bent my jaw around. I went down to the doctor and the doctor just put me in physiotherapy." Sandy summed up the lack of connection and support she felt in her statement, "Yes, I wanted out, but like I said, where do I go?"

The abusers continued to gain more and more power in the relationships as their girlfriends and wives became increasingly disconnected from the influence of family and friends. Even when they encountered helping professionals the issue of possible abuse was seldom addressed and this increased their isolation. Equally damaging to the young women was their increasing sense of separation from their own feelings and needs.

Loss of Self

Joan described the change in her personality during the relationship, "I became a totally different person. Before I met him I was as I am now. My Mom has noticed the change and the other day she said, 'You're back!'" Anne noticed a decrease in her self-esteem and it worried her; "Before I was a very independent person but I've become a very dependent person. I lost my outgoingness." However, even though she recognized the negative change in herself, she refused to listen to others' opinions regarding her relationship. "But I don't want to do it that way because if I'm going to make a decision I'm going to make it on my own. I don't need my friends. They're not me. They don't know what I'm feeling." This was a form of self-isolation that distanced her from the concern and support of those who cared about her.

In order to deal with the loneliness and fear, participants would repress their feelings or even dissociate from them. In this way they became isolated from themselves. Vicki learned to hide her emotions and avoid conflict, "I was mad but I didn't show it. And then usually after he gets mad, he cools off and acts normal again. I'll act okay but I still am really mad." She didn't express her anger but kept it inside, "I don't say nothing. I just sit there and cry but I don't say nothing." Sandy described how she coped, "I shut down all emotions. I had my daughters, the best thing I ever did. I had them, they were

mine to love. And that kept my mind off other things."

Abusers were careful to leave no obvious evidence of physical abuse and victims accommodated them by hiding from others the proof of the crimes committed against them. Tina recalled, "He used to hit me, but he would always say that he never hit me. He would never leave bruises on me." Similarly, Sandy reported, "I think he was smart, because he never hit me on the face. It was always on my body where I could hide it by a shirt or pants." Fear, the stigma of being regarded as 'abused' and an increasing sense of powerlessness were agents contributing to the the victims' collaboration in their own isolation and entrapment.

Powerlessness

A power imbalance resulted from subjection to threats and possessiveness, financial restrictions, and verbal, sexual and physical abuse. Tina didn't think she could leave "because he would come after me and whoever I was with." In Sandy's and Joan's cases, since there were children involved, their partners were able to control them by not giving them money. Sandy remembers, "He left. He was with this other woman. I knew it was happening, but there was no money to get out, and he finally came home and said he was leaving."

Vicki felt used when forced to "do stuff that (she didn't) want to do." She described how her partner's domineering sexual behavior affected her, "It makes me feel not very good, like I'm only good for certain things and then when he's done he goes off and does what he wants and I go home." Tina described the sexual coercion she experienced:

Um, it was only when he wanted it and the way he wanted to. I felt hurt because before it was always good. It was just up to him, like whenever he wanted to. Yeah, I couldn't even lay in the same bed as him. He used to say he wanted it. I didn't want him to be near me. I always felt dirty.

Tina finally gave up on having any control, "Yes, after a while I just let him do what ever he wanted.

The young women felt extremely helpless and their powerlessness was manifested in many ways. They came to believe that they had no voice in the

relationship. They were confused by their partners inconsistent behaviour and started to doubt their own judgment. The end result of their confusion and frustration was fearfulness and anxiety.

Lack of Voice

The participants shared a sense of not being able to communicate with their partners. Anne stated "I'm not allowed to say certain words because it gets on his nerves and stuff." She explained how she felt unable to express her needs and feelings.

It's like he's blocking my voice. It would give me this feeling almost like I'm talking to a deaf person or something. His lips are moving but he's not hearing. It seems that the only way I can get through to him is to pinch him because I know that that hurts. It made me feel so inferior, like I couldn't do or say anything. I felt totally helpless. I just couldn't get it through to him how I was feeling. It made me feel like it was all a big joke. But there's really nothing I can do that, like, I don't know, he just doesn't listen to me.

Anne vividly described how she resorted to physical violence to try to communicate her frustration to her partner. "It's like he just...he's big compared to me. He's a big guy. Me punching him as hard as I can feels like nothing to him. He just sits there and laughs or just, I don't know!"

Joan quit expressing herself:

He got mad when I voiced my opinion so I stopped voicing it. I felt completely powerless because every time I tried to explain how I felt he would turn it around to be the opposite, he would never validate my feelings.

Sandy, too, was unable to talk openly. "I couldn't be myself. If we went out and I got all bubbly or happy he was mad." Vicki felt so intimidated by her partner's rages that she learned to say nothing, "If I don't say anything then it'll just get over quicker." In order to avoid conflict she would not express her negative emotions. "Oh, it makes me go crazy not being able to say stuff. My head just goes crazy with all that stuff that I just never say!"

Not only did intimidation and fear prevent communication between

the partners, it also blocked disclosure to others. When Tina's Mom would call, she would pretend everything was okay because she was afraid her partner would find out about the conversation, "Yeah, I would tell her everything was okay, but I really wanted to tell her it wasn't."

Confusion

The young women described the confusion and frustration resulting from the 'mind games' played by their partners. Even though Joan had suffered severe physical abuse, she felt that "most of it was mental because he would turn situations around to make me think that I was crazy, that I was just imagining everything." Sandy recalls how:

It started playing on my mind, but it didn't matter what I said to him I was always wrong. Like I could say, 'How was your day today?' and if he was in a bad mood it was my fault. It wasn't the guy at work. It was my fault.

Anne described her tension over arguments she and her partner would have:

Like last night I just didn't know what to do and we got into this huge fight and I tried telling him how I felt, and he'd reverse it so that it was like, my fault, you know. And I was just getting so frustrated I just didn't know what to do. It was just so hard.

She went on to describe other 'mind games' she was subjected to:

But he makes it seem like it was something really bad and I didn't tell him. He'll tell me a story that he knows will get me upset - He's moving, or something stupid. He makes me believe it so I get all upset, and I start freaking out, and he'll go 'just kidding, just kidding.'

Tina described how her partner "would break up with me, then want to get back together and then break up with me again."

Anne and Vicki both felt frustrated after a disagreement. Anne stated, "I feel really bad afterwards. I never win anyways." Similarly, Vicki explained, "It would always end up being my fault. I would feel like I was always the bad guy and I was always the one saying sorry when I didn't do anything." Joan's sense of powerlessness is conveyed by her statement, "I wanted some control.

I had no control of the situation, whatsoever."

Self-Doubt

Constant putdowns had an extremely negative affect on the participants' self-images. Lisa described the changes in herself, "I'm just scared of what it's doing to me. I used to feel so good about myself and everyday I'd just get dressed up and I was outgoing and now I've got such low self esteem. Tina recalled, "I didn't believe in myself, that I could do anything."

Joan wondered, "Maybe I am over reacting and maybe I am going crazy!" Vicki thought, "Sometimes I wonder, is it true? If he calls me stupid or says I look gross, like do I?" Sandy stated:

I'm very picky on myself and this is the thinnest I've ever been and the fittest. I feel great, but yet I could lose another inch off my stomach, or I have hives on my face; now what did I eat that I have those hives?

Sandy's partner asked her:

Who's gonna look at you now that you have two kids? And that was one that he always said to me. No one will want you now because you have kids. And now I believe that but then I don't get out.

Gradually the abuse eroded self confidence so completely that the females doubted their own judgment even about small matters. Sandy explained:

It was really hard to grasp because at the end I really did start thinking, 'Yeah I guess maybe if I hadn't asked him to go and mow the lawn because it was waist high, or if I mowed the lawn it was never right, I didn't cut it right.' Or if I washed the truck I missed a spot. And to this day I still wonder what I think!

Anxiety

Vicki knew she wanted out but she worried about "what would happen after we broke up." Anne described the tension she experienced trying to avoid conflict in her relationship:

It's just, I was so stressed out and I had so much pressure worrying about what he was doing, what he was gonna think

and trying to hide, and worrying about what I was going to say around him, and making sure I didn't say the wrong thing to make him mad or anything.

The ever present tension sapped the energy of the women and left them little strength to think about changing their situations. At times their helplessness led to despair. Tina recalled:

I'd get so nervous that I'd end up in the hospital. I was hooked on Ativan, I was taking those, I was taking about seven of them a day. And I had three nervous breakdowns when I was with him. It was really scary. I would have dreams. I would sit there and things would come back to my mind and I'd get really nervous and I would either drink or take pills. I just sat in the kitchen, I broke an egg on the floor and I sat there for two hours and I cried. I didn't let anybody touch me or come near me. I was just crying and I was shaking so bad. I didn't know what was happening to me, why I was shaking and why I was crying. And sometimes I thought, I'm going to die here. I'm going to die in this trailer.

At times the attempts to reach out to others were dramatic and desperate as in Tina's case:

I couldn't handle that anymore so I went and got drunk and then I ended up putting a gun to my head. I phoned friends 'cause I knew I needed help. I went to the hospital and they took me to the city.

Sandy had panic attacks, "I could tell just by the look in his eye and that would start one. My heart would beat, I would sweat, I would be jumpy, very nervous, I wouldn't sleep, I'd pace, I couldn't go outside and walk so I paced." She started to develop a stomach problem related to anxiety. "I ended up getting sick and I spent about two months in the hospital." Sandy is still suffering from ongoing trauma. "And I'm scared, I always find myself looking over my back, 'Is he watching me?'" She feels she won't be over it until she quits looking. "If I see a truck, is it going to be him? Will that fear ever go away is what I want to know." Considering their isolated situations,

their lack of power and their fear, it is not surprising that all of the victims experienced feelings of entrapment.

Entrapment

Entrapment was a very real feeling related to warranted fear, a sense of obligation and lack of resources. Vicki felt trapped by the seriousness of her partner's intentions for their relationship:

It's just that I want my own time to do my own things, go out with my friends, stay at home. Our relationship is too serious. I need my own space. I feel trapped. This is so serious for me cause, like, I'm only sixteen. I feel like I'm in over my head, like he already talks about, 'when we get married,' but it's oh, so serious, you know!

Joan stated, "He always made me feel that I couldn't do it on my own. When he went to jail it forced me to leave him." Tina described how she was "really scared and alone. And I felt trapped." She goes on to say that if someone would listen she would say, "I want out." Her partner would send his mother over to keep an eye on her when he was away. "I kind of felt trapped because if it wasn't him, it was his mom."

Sandy described an incident of physical abuse, early in her relationship when she asserted herself. "On the way home I told him, 'Now it's too late for me to do my homework.' I was upset and he grabbed me by the hood and threw me up against the truck." The abuse was more severe the second time she took a stand, "I told him, 'I'm upset.' He grabbed me and threw me up against the truck. I put my hand up on the box of the truck, but it slipped and he hit my hand and he broke it."

After they moved in together Sandy's partner controlled her activities through threat of physical abuse. "If I was five minutes late coming home from my Mom's I was in for it and I just didn't want that. I couldn't handle it physically." He also used physical abuse to confine her if she attempted to leave him. "I would try to leave and he would grab me and throw me back down and kick and punch me."

Sandy knew early in her relationship that she wanted out but she was terrified to leave and felt trapped, "I never had that chance to experience any

other relationships. He never gave me that chance." When she finally left her partner, he intimidated her by constantly watching her until she finally returned to him. "He just wouldn't leave me alone and I knew there was no way, he was always there watching, it really scared me. At least this way I knew I could go to work and come home." She returned because of fear. "Fear, because I was scared, it was fear of what he would do to me if I didn't go back." Even though Sandy and her partner are now divorced the control continues. "He's still trying to control me and so is his mom. They watch me. They sit there and they watch my apartment." As in Tina's case, the attempts to control Sandy and monitor her behavior came not only from her partner, but from his mother as well.

Joan was also subjected to severe physical abuse, even during her pregnancies. "And then I got it and I was pregnant!" Joan returned to her partner when she realized she was pregnant. "So if it hadn't of been for getting pregnant, I probably never would have gone back to him. But I felt trapped. I didn't want to (go back), but it was, like, what else can I do? I don't want to go on welfare." This is an example not only of entrapment, but of the ambivalence that permeated the experiences of all of the participants.

Breaking Free from Abuse

Feelings of ambivalence provided the initial momentum for change in the experiences of the young women. At times they seemed paralyzed by this inner turmoil but eventually they became so frustrated by constant indecision, disappointment and anxiety that they knew they had to take action.

Ambivalence

Ambivalence is "the state or condition of having conflicting thoughts or feelings, as love and hate, about the same person at the same time" (World Book Dictionary, 1986, p. 65). Ambivalence was displayed in the young women's conflicting emotions in response to their partners' unpredictable behavior, their fears of staying in the relationship clashing with their fears of leaving, their hope for change despite their subjection to continued abuse. For the most part ambivalence prevented the young women from making decisions and carrying them out. However, at times, when the constant

frustration and uncertainty became unbearable, ambivalence became a catalyst for change providing the impetus for positive action.

Equivocal Responses to Confusing Behavior

Since abusive behavior was interspersed with normal, loving behavior in all of the relationships, the females experienced many paradoxical and confusing emotions. They felt anger toward their partners when they were being abused, but feelings of love resurfaced when their partners' behavior toward them became loving. Fear of leaving and surviving on their own clashed with fear of staying and suffering continued abuse. Renewed hope that their partners' abusive behavior would change was frequently dashed when the abusive cycle continued after periods of relative calm. Ambivalence grew from the clash of emotions such as hate, love, guilt, anger, fear and hope.

Tina recalled, "I thought I should go when he was abusive but the thought of having an older boyfriend made me want to stay." Anne described her uncertainty:

Well, I love him, I do. And, I like being around him when he's like nice and stuff. I'm just confused, like one minute I think I might be better without him and stuff but I can't, I just can't see it happening you know? I can't do it. I don't want to break up with him, but I'm just tired of going through this, you know.

After an abusive incident her partner's behavior would improve for a while and she would have renewed hope for the relationship:

Ever since that happened he has been really nice and stuff. He's not going to drink around me anymore. I told him that. He has to prove to me because he won't get another chance. As much as I would be hurt by it, I would not give in again.

She convinced herself that she would not stand for any further abuse.

Vicki talked about how she wanted to break up with her boyfriend but had many opposing thoughts:

I've been thinking about breaking up for a long time, but when I look at him it's really hard. Sometimes he's really nice to me. Yeah he treats me rude and stuff, but he always tells me he loves

me and stuff. It's so hard because there are so many good things and so many bad things, you know. Of course, all the bad things are the reason why I'm unhappy. The good things, maybe that's what stopping me. I think there are more reasons for me to get out or more bad things, but all the good things stick in my mind when I'm thinking about the bad things. So if I think about the good things all the bad things come to mind.

Joan wanted to be free from the abuse but always felt she had to "give it another chance for the sake of the kids. It was this huge guilt thing. On one hand I hated his guts, but on the other I hated to see him walk out." For Sandy there were long periods of relatively normal behavior between episodes of severe physical abuse, and she found herself believing that her spouse would no longer abuse her, "After he threatened me at the start, with suicide and stuff, things smoothed out for quite a while and we started to enjoy it, and then as soon as I moved in with him all hell broke loose." When she had her first child he wanted her to marry him and "he was good from the time she was born until two weeks before the wedding" when he became violent once again.

Conflicting Fears

Vicki's statement, "I think I'm mostly scared," reflects how participants constantly weighed their fears about staying and suffering continued maltreatment, against their fears of leaving and surviving on their own. Vicki went on to describe the uncertainty she experienced, "I didn't leave. I wanted to but I didn't. I don't know why I couldn't leave. It's not that he's no God or nothing. I always want to leave, but I never can." One part of her knew what she wanted to do, while another part inhibited her from taking any action:

I feel I have control over what I want, even though I don't do what I want sometimes. Like, I'm sure I do want to leave, but I don't know what's keeping me. There must be a little bit of me that doesn't want to, otherwise, I'm sure I would have done it before.

She was also unsure of how to break off a relationship:

It's everything but it's nothing, you know. There's so many things that I just don't know how to do it. And I don't know how I would ever start to tell him that I don't want to go out with him anymore.

She worried about his potential reactions to a breakup:

I also wonder what he would do if I did break up. He might get really angry with me. I know he would get mad and everything, and I don't know if he would go around embarrassing me, or if he would try to make me jealous by fooling around with another girl at school. If I would ever break up with him I would be very worried about him. I know that he would go nuts. I know he would.

Vicki was afraid of the long-term changes a breakup would bring, "It would be so different." She went on to describe her fear and confusion:

I'm just afraid of losing him as a friend and everything. I don't know what it is, if I can't get someone else after? I think I'm just scared of changing my whole lifestyle and losing someone who has been in my life for a long time. Well, it feels, oh, crazy. Sometimes I just get so mad and so frustrated and I don't even know why I'm not breaking up or whatever. I'm scared of losing someone who has been so much a part of my life, you know. It just seems like so much is thrown away if we break up. Okay, but it's not like I should stay with him just because, just for him.

Tina described her fears:

If I stayed he would hurt me and I'd end up in the hospital but if I left I would be so afraid of him wouldn't be able to go anywhere. I don't know why but I'm still scared of the dark and closets.

Sandy sums up her contradictory fears in a stark statement, "If I stayed he would hurt me, if I left he would kill me".

Hoping for Miracles

Joan's felt guilty about splitting up the family and she allowed herself to weaken and become sexually involved with her partner again:

He kept calling and bugging me and pushing my buttons, making me feel sorry for him, that way. And I let him come and stay with us for a week, to spend time with our son and after that I found out that I was pregnant.

The second pregnancy was the main reason why she returned to him. "because it was not only one child, it was now two, and the whole thing where I don't want to take them from their Dad." The abuse continued and when asked why she stayed Joan replied, "I don't know. I couldn't tell you, because, I think, he kept saying, of course that he was going to get help and he wanted to see the kids."

Another form of ambivalence was manifested in the discrepancy between what all the young women experienced to be true and what they wanted to believe was true. Hopeful to salvage their relationships, they tended to believe promises that the men would change despite prior evidence to the contrary. Joan noted, "I knew things weren't normal right from the start but I thought I could talk him into changing." Anne was extremely upset by her partner's emotionally abusive behavior and his advances toward another girl. However, after he apologized she stated, "I think he'll change, I'm pretty sure he will. I want to be with him especially since he's going to make these changes. Then I won't have any doubt." Vicki echoed Anne's sentiments, "I might as well stick with it, things might get better."

Anne talked to her mom about her relationship but she didn't like the advice she got. In her words "It's usually stuff I don't want to hear." Tina recalled, "I knew that he held a gun to this girl's head, but he told me that it wasn't loaded and I found out it was." She ignored the fact that holding a weapon to another individual's head is a violent act, in any case. Joan mentioned, "I don't really know where it started to get bad because I kind of blocked it out. I didn't want to hear it, kind of thing." Even after severe physical abuse she returned to her partner, "Two days later I was back."

Anne minimized the extreme possessiveness which had led to her earlier dissatisfaction with her partner:

Because the only thing that was getting in the way was his attitude and him not letting me out and stuff. But he's willing

to change so everything will be fine, I don't ask for much, just once in a while to be able to go out with my friends and not to be treated like trash.

She wanted to believe she was safe despite her partner's violent behavior toward other people and objects, and his intense anger toward her. "I don't think he would ever hit me. He takes it out on other things, not me. He always stops himself. He knows that he shouldn't ever hit me." However, she admitted to the possibility of abuse in her next statement, "If he ever comes close to doing it, sure maybe I'll get a black eye but it'll be over and I'll charge him. It's stupid for me to say that I'm going to take the chance. But he saw that I was ready to leave and I was not going to come back. I know I wouldn't stay 'cause I was ready to leave right there. Sandy's hopes for change were less idealistic and reflected how very trapped she felt, "I wished he would fall in a big hole and die."

Indecision

Vicki was torn between her desire to leave and her inability to act despite her boyfriend's unacceptable behavior, "I don't know why I just didn't leave after that. But I've changed back and forth back and forth 'cause I've been doing whatever he said. I'm starting to change back into my old self." She explained how her ambivalent emotions led to confusion, "Um, well, it's just that I would get so frustrated, sad and angry that I just wanted everything to stop, you know." She realized that she was even unsure of the reasons for her own behavior, "Then I said sorry because, I don't even know why I said sorry!" Sandy couldn't understand how her partner could "go from one extreme to the other, one minute happy, the next screaming at me."

Ambivalence meant that all participants went in and out of the relationships several times before making a permanent break. Even after moving out, Joan's uncertainty kept her from letting go completely, "I went back to dating him but we weren't living together."

Ambivalent Emotions as Catalysts for Change

The same conflicting emotions that sometimes left the women feeling confused and paralyzed could, at other times, become catalysts for change, tipping the balance toward their eventual decision to break free from the

abuse. Although anger frustrated and dis-empowered the victims most of the time, it sometimes became empowering. For example, Anne's anger at her partner's behavior turned to disgust and disinterest, "It just didn't feel the same. I almost didn't want him to touch me because I didn't have any feeling there. I just didn't care." And she noticed a major change in her previously subservient attitude, "I'm not so anxious to see him. I'm not right at his feet." Anne described her anger:

I've got so much anger. He gets me so mad. A lot of the time I just get so mad if I'm around him, if he gets me mad, I go nuts, I just go psycho on him. I just start punching him and stuff but he just sits there and laughs at me and it's just like, it's ignorant for me to say I want to hurt him, but I just get so mad that I just want to hurt him! Because that's the only way I can get through.

For her, the very anger and frustration that first caused her to feel powerless eventually forced her to recognize the change in herself and face her situation. "But if you're afraid of fights, then sometimes you just stuff it all away, and then eventually it seeps out anyway. That scares me because I've never been a violent person."

Of all of the emotions experienced by the participants, regret seemed to be the greatest catalyst for change. Anne became dissatisfied when she realized what she had missed by being cut off from others:

I regret not spending time with my friends. I missed a lot of good times. I'm sick of coming to school on Monday and hearing, "Oh yeah we had the best time, you should have been there. I want to be able to go to school on Monday and tell people how I had so much fun.

Likewise Vicki stated, "And I'm going to lose the whole fun of my high school years because I don't go out and I've missed all my grade ten." She described her frustration over opportunities she had missed. "I've had so many expectations for doing things but, I don't know, not now!" Sandy regretted the years when she wasn't allowed to be with her family. "That's hard to deal with because now, at twenty-six, I'm learning to re-love my brothers and to see their kids. I watched them grow up without knowing

them. Like my oldest nephew will be twelve and I don't know him." For the young women, feeling regret was a step toward finding oneself again and reconnecting with family, friends and community.

Although ambivalence can be a paralyzing emotion, the very fact that it exists indicates that one is weighing the possibility of change. It is difficult to delineate the stages in an abusive relationship but the presence of ambivalence means there is dissatisfaction that may eventually lead to action, and, therefore, it can be considered a starting point for escaping from abuse. When inner conflict was met with acknowledgement of abuse and positive connection with others the greatest opportunity for escape and empowerment was created.

Acknowledgement

Often signs of dysfunction, abuse and danger were ignored or downplayed. Anne explains how she tended to deny the significance of unhealthy behavior, "A lot of the time I don't think that it's very important. If something happens, I think, 'Well, I'll just get over it, like, no big deal. Well now I realize that I can get another boyfriend!'"

Ongoing abuse and reoccurring disappointments chipped away at the young women's denial. Joan said "I knew deep down from the beginning that things weren't right, but I had to face it when his friends started to lie for him and I found dope around the house." Vicki was able to generalize one incident of deceit to the potential for others. "If he can lie about that he can lie about anything. If he cared he wouldn't lie at all." She described how her partner's behavior slowly broke down her caring for him. "I think that I start disliking him just a little bit more, every little time he does something like that, you know."

Anne began to realize that she had little influence over her mate's behavior. She explained, "What he does is his own choice and I can't let myself think it's my fault because it's not. Whatever he does, he does on his own. I don't make him do anything." She even generalized her own situation to that of others in denial. "Most people, they say, 'No, he loves me, he'd never hit me, ever' and then you find out they're getting abused and stuff."

Sandy knew the first time her partner abused her "that it wasn't right. When I saw other normal couples I wished that I could have a relationship where we respected each other." However, it often it took a extreme incident of abuse to force the young women to face the truth about the danger, and the unlikelihood of change in their situations. For example, Anne told how she was shocked when her partner's emotional abuse suddenly became physical, "When he just reached over and hit me, knowing that he would do it, I just freaked out and ran to the door. It made me realize!"

Tina's eyes were opened by a terrifying episode of substance abuse, rage and physical violence. She described this particular incident and how it made her admit to herself that her partner would never change:

One time, on our third month anniversary, he was supposed to take me out for supper, but he popped a whole bunch of Tylenol threes and some Ativan and a whole 26 straight, and I knew that he wasn't going to change then. He got really abusive that night and he trashed the house. He kicked this beer box and it hit me in the face and he grabbed me and he was shaking me. He threw me in the bedroom and he told me to go to bed.

In light of her experiences, Tina had an important advice to offer to others, "You have your whole life ahead of you. Don't rush things. And watch for the ones that say they'll change 'cause they won't." Vicki offered this counsel to other young women, "Think before you get in over your head. Don't do anything you don't want to do. Give each person their own space. Tell him your feelings and know his feelings. Don't change your life to please him."

As Vicki began to acknowledge the reality of the abuse in her relationship, she started to think about the qualities she desired in a partner and how she could learn more about herself by having more than one relationship:

You get to find out what kind of people you like. 'Because it's hard with one person. I want someone who likes the things I like to do, that I can trust. Maybe it will show me how to act with having more, better relationships, instead of having the same

old attitude with one person.

She realized that the isolation was stifling her growth, and she looked forward to expanding her knowledge and experience. "I can do more things, learn more things." She had become aware of the importance of connection to others for her own wellbeing.

Connection

Although Vicki sometimes resented her family's disapproval of her boyfriend, she felt good that they cared about her welfare. "It makes me feel that they care about what's happening to me. Like my sister and my mom and dad always worry about what's going to happen in the future." Since they were largely isolated, when the women did experience connection to others it often had great impact upon them.

Even when she was not ready to leave her partner, Sandy banked on the support she felt her brother would give her if she asked him:

It gave me some inner strength that I knew that if worse come to worse I could call him. I think he started to worry but didn't say anything. He was always over there all the time. I think he was too scared to do anything.

Although Tina felt she had little support from the rest of her family, she was influenced by a friend of her brother's. "He would always tell me, he knew what was going on 'cause he could see it and he would always tell me, "Why don't you just leave him and I'll help you pack?" It felt good to know that there was somebody that cared. He would tell me, "When he's at work I'll come over and help you pack," and I'd always say, "No, I'm going to stay."

For Vicki, the embarrassment she experienced when her partner mistreated her in public was a form of connection to others and a catalyst for her eventual decision to leave him:

Other people; they'll notice what kind of a person he is. I feel like everyone is looking at me and I wonder if they're thinking, 'Why don't you say something or walk away or yell at him or something?'

When others made comments about her boyfriend's behavior she realized that they also saw it as unacceptable. "It sort of helps me decide what I should

do. If nobody said nothing I would probably just stay in it." Others made comments about the seriousness of her relationship and how it isolated her from her peers. "A lot of people think that if I look back I'll regret all the time I've wasted missing out on all my friends." She listened to them and she also compared her relationship to theirs' and realized that hers could be much better, "I'd feel maybe mine isn't that good." The more connected to others the participants became, the more they became aware of their own needs, and their own ability to change their situations.

Joan's friends helped her to become connected by "just being there for me, not judging me and forcing me to get out of the house. I saw that other men were interested in me." Sandy's friend made her feel strong when he said, "That's not right, nobody should put up with that."

Empowerment

Empowerment seemed to grow out of the combination of catalyst emotions, new insights about oneself and one's partner, and increasing connection to and support from others. The young women became more assertive with their partners and, in some cases they saw positive results. Anne decided that she just wanted to get the message across to her boyfriend "that I'm not going to take it." She previously felt she had no voice, but as she asserted herself more, she noticed a change in her boyfriend's behavior and stated, "Lately it's been weird. It's almost like he heard me. We don't fight as much because I think he knows I'll say what I want to now." She realized that she could take care of herself and was responsible for her own happiness:

I have to think of myself before anybody else. Because I was just thinking of him; how's he going to feel, how's he going to react, not how am I going to feel. I just feel like I'm taking more control in the relationship. I'm not just sitting there and taking it all.

Vicki gradually worked through her ambivalence and decided to break up with her boyfriend. "I just want to break up for me. For a while I had been saying, 'I might as well just make the best,' but I realize that I don't have to do that." She described how her self-confidence had increased:

Before he used to tell me what to do and what not to do and

even though I would want to do it, I would never do it. Now I just do it, anyhow. If I try there's so much I can do - so much I've missed and so much I've learned. I've realized that I can do whatever I want to, you know.

Despite her partner's attempts to isolate her from her mom Sandy decided "to heck with him. I'm proud of my baby and I'm going to Grandma's. I'll face the consequences later." Later she demanded protection from the police:

He phoned and threatened to come and get the girls and that's when I went to the R.C.M.P. I said he's phoning me, he's threatening me and my daughters. Enough is enough. Then they read my diary and that's what they charged him on.

She also refused to back down from her abuser's manipulating behavior in court. "The control is unreal. In court he was looking at me and balling up his fist. He was still trying to manipulate me but I wasn't backing down from him, not this time, like that was the last time." When he phoned and demanded to know where she had been, she replied, "Well you're not my husband and we have our own life."

It empowered Joan that she "didn't have to rely on his paycheck anymore." She decided "with help from family and friends I can support the kids on my own." Sandy had learned that once you stop trying to change someone else you can grow yourself. I've stopped focusing on having him make me happy. I'll do it myself."

Summary

The young women were vulnerable when they entered the relationship and this made it easy for their partners to isolate them and establish control. Once in the relationships they experienced a increasing sense of powerlessness and felt entrapped. They were faced with ambivalent emotions and generally found it difficult to make and carry out decisions. However, increasing dissatisfaction eventually forced them to acknowledge the reality and danger of their unhappy situations. Further acknowledgement came when they reconnected with others and received their feedback and support. The more affiliation to family, friends and community they

experienced, the more empowered they became. Eventually all of them left their abusive situations.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Existing knowledge regarding abusive relationships focuses largely upon the adult experience. The present findings expand the reference of this knowledge into the context of the experience of adolescent females in abusive relationships. I have chosen a maze to represent the complex process of involvement in an abusive relationship (Figure 5-1). By thinking of each participant as having her own personal maze to negotiate, one can see how perplexing and confusing an abused teen's experience can be. Like one lost in a maze it is difficult for an abused teenager to see the larger view of what is happening to her. There are three stages to negotiating the maze; entering, being lost and finding one's way out.

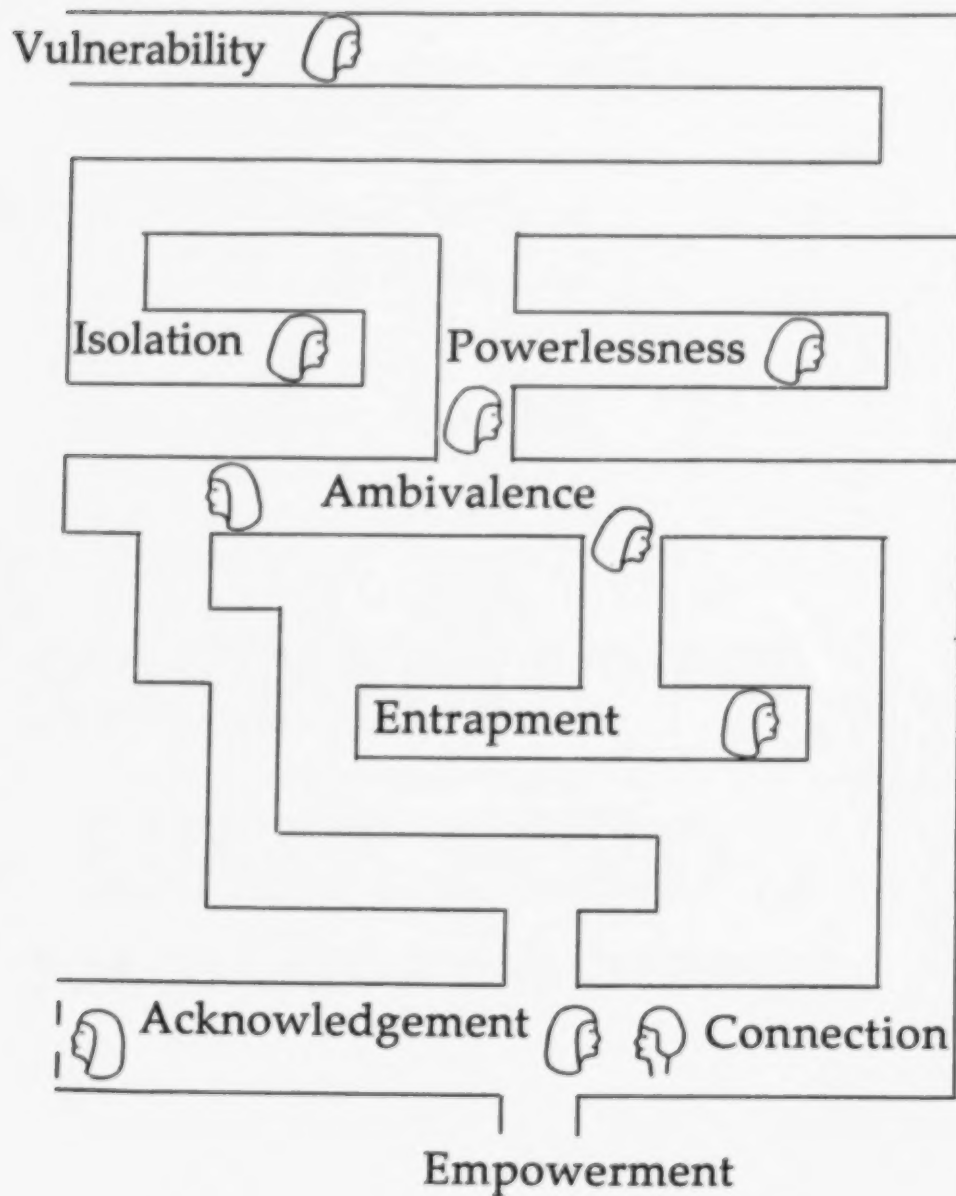
Entering the Maze

Vulnerability

Vulnerability can be described as the state of being "sensitive to criticism, temptations or influences." (World Book Dictionary, 1986, p. 2348). The participants were vulnerable in a multitude of ways. They were unhappy at home and were looking for an escape or a way to rebel. Since they felt a need for status in the eyes of their peers, they would comply with the expectations of others in order to belong. They were pressured by their peers to become involved with the opposite sex and pressured by their partners to remain involved, even though they were developmentally immature and not ready for serious intimate relationships. Mikel Brown and Gilligan studied young girls and found that "in the absence of experience and in the presence of intense desires to be with people who are loving and genuine, they can rush too quickly into relationships and vulnerability" (p. 168). In this study initial vulnerability led to poor choices to become involved with abusive partners that only brought the young women deeper into the confusion of their already complicated mazes.

Because they lacked maturity, social knowledge and role models of healthy relationships, the girls made poor decisions regarding choice of partners. All of their partners came from abusive homes and, therefore, also lacked role models of healthy relationships. There was a power imbalance at onset in all of the relationships since the girls were an average of two years

Figure 5-1. The Experience of an Adolescent in an Abusive Relationship



younger than their partners. The young women were confused by the manipulative behaviour of their partners, and having witnessed and experienced varying degrees of abuse within their families, tended to downplay their own mistreatment.

This tendency is illustrated in an excerpt, from Mikel Brown and Gilligan, describing the feelings and thoughts of a young woman named Liza regarding her boyfriend:

Although "he was just really possessive" and she initially thought, "how I could be sort of free, how I could be unattached," Liza stays in the relationship. "He cared about me enough to like pursue," she says. Thinking about the "really good time" they had together and the security of the relationship, Liza covers over her feelings of anger and frustration by naming them "impulsive" and "irrational": "It's good to be like your own person," she explains, "but there is a point where you've got to say, you know, I really did care about him and I was just being sort of irrational." After all, she adds, "You can't criticize someone for caring too much."

Liza does not wish to hurt her boyfriend since it is not good to hurt someone," she tells her interviewer; "I didn't have anything to lose." Yet what Liza loses is voice, saying that a relationship that did not feel good to her is good for her. Taken over by her boyfriend's romantic sacrifice, swept away by his care and hurt feelings, she justifies staying in a possessive and oppressive relationship by effectively retelling her story - renaming her anger and loss, her desire for freedom, to "have my own life." (Mikel Brown & Gilligan, p. 213).

Similarly, the present participants seemed to gain identity by meeting the needs of others while neglecting their own feelings and needs, and this made them extremely susceptible to abuse. They seemed to be entering a "womanhood where staying with themselves feels selfish and actively being with others feels selfless" (Gilligan, 1992, p. 177). The romantic ideal increased the vulnerability of the young women who trusted that someone else's love

would take care of all of their needs:

We live in a culture that is ambivalent toward female achievement, proficiency, independence, right to a full and equal life. Our culture devalues both women and the qualities which it projects onto us, such as nurturance, cooperation, and intuition. It has taught us to undervalue ourselves. Too often we deride our own abilities. We denigrate our work and discount our success. We don't feel we have the right to our dreams, or, if we achieve them, we feel undeserving. Small failures may confirm our sense of inevitable failure, making us unable to take necessary risks. We learn to look outward for markers of acceptability and are particularly vulnerable to putting our self-esteem in the hands of lovers or husbands, believing that only someone else's approval can confer worth (Oreintstein, 1994, p. xx).

Immaturity, inexperience, and naivete increased the vulnerability of the young women. Once involved in the relationships they tended to overlook the abuse and downplay their own feelings and needs to please their boyfriends. This made it easy for their partners to isolate them from the influence of others, thus establishing greater control over them.

Lost in the Maze

Isolation

Like a person lost in a maze, all of the participants became increasingly isolated as the relationships progressed and the abuse escalated. Since their families and friends did not approve of their relationships, the young women felt that they could not discuss their problems with them and because they were immature and not yet ready for autonomy, their dependence on parents simply shifted to dependence on their abusive partners. Lewis found that "abused adolescents are often isolated and get most of their information about relationships from boyfriends" (1987, p. 5). A study by the Y.W.C.A. found that abusive males "deliberately alienate them (their female partners) from their family and friends" (1992, p. 77). In this study the females were cut off from the influence and support of others, including professionals that they

turned to for assistance. They also suffered loss of their own identities, since they hid the abuse from others, repressed their feelings and dissociated from their unhappy situations.

Powerlessness

As the young women became more deeply involved in the relationships, they began to feel helpless and anxious like one who has been trying to negotiate a maze for a long time. The power imbalance became more pronounced and the females succumbed to verbal abuse, threats, extreme possessiveness, and financial, sexual and physical abuse. At first they allowed themselves to be controlled and complied to please their partners. As the abuse increased and the girls became more fearful, they complied to smooth things over and prevent further conflict. They felt humiliated, disregarded and violated and their self-esteem plummeted.

Fear intensified, and this perpetuated further compliance and greater loss of identity, causing them to further suppress their growing resentment. They felt they had no voice and were unable to make an impact on their partner or change their situations in any way. Because they were isolated they could not gain strength from the support of others. Eventually they became confused and started to doubt their own judgment, even blaming themselves for their partner's behavior and wondering if they actually deserved the abuse they were experiencing. Lewis found that the females she interviewed were equally bewildered. As one young woman stated, "I needed mainly to understand what was happening to me" (1987, p. 6).

The participants became extremely anxious and some of them suffered from depression and panic attacks. One of them attempted suicide. Straus found that "adolescents make suicidal gestures when they feel particularly powerless over their lives; in resorting to a suicide attempt they may be trying to take charge of their deaths" (1994, p. 18).

Entrapment

Eventually one lost in a maze will feel trapped when efforts to find a new path are met with repeated failure and frustration. Likewise, at some point, all of the females felt a sense of entrapment, a manifestation of their powerlessness. They became paralyzed by fear, and overwhelmed by

difficulties; simply 'possessions' unable to take control of their own lives. Intermittent abuse interspersed with normal behavior caused them to become confused and unable to act. For those with children, the sense of entrapment was intensified by lack of financial resources and feelings of obligation to their families.

Finding One's Way Out of the Maze

Although at first paralyzing, ambivalent thoughts and feelings were the initial catalyst for eventual change. Acknowledgement of the abusive nature of their relationships came from growing dissatisfaction and frustration combined with confirming feedback received from other people. Reconnection to others and to one's own feelings empowered the young women and allowed them to garner the strength needed to take the positive action required to change their lives.

Ambivalence

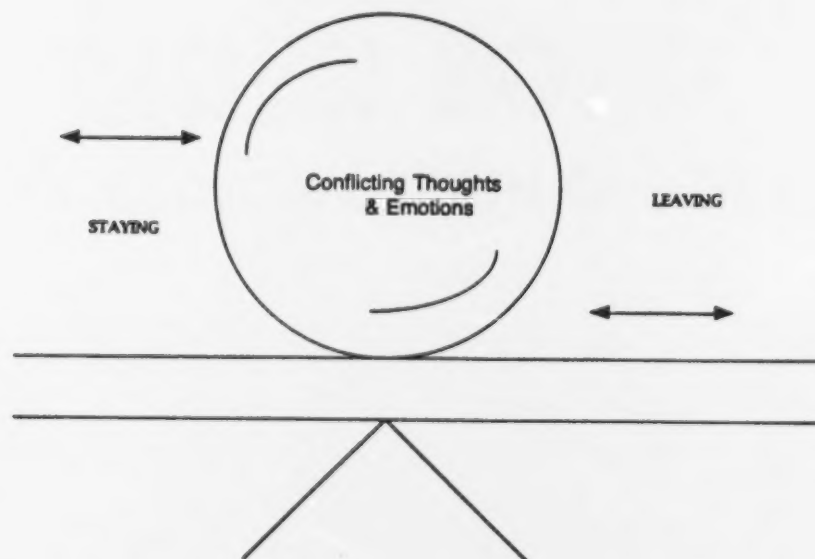
Similar to one at a crossroad in a maze the young women became increasingly confused and unsure of what action to take as their relationships of abuse progressed. This ambivalence was precipitated by mixed messages conveyed by their partners' behavior, which ranged from loving to abusive. They felt torn in many aspects of their experiences; between frustration and anger toward their partners and hope that the relationship would improve, between their desire for freedom and their feelings of affection, obligation and guilt, between the desire to express their true feelings and the tendency to suppress their feelings to avoid conflict, between their desire to end the relationship and their inability to act on that desire, between what they wanted to do and what their partners wanted them to do, and between being with their families and friends and being with their partners.

Those who work with victims of abuse find "fear is the most predominant feeling that surfaces" (Y.M.C.A., 1992, p. 75). For the abused young women fear could be an extremely immobilizing emotion, since they experienced conflicting fears and were constantly weighing one against the other. For example, fears of conflict and violence were weighed against fears of change and of being alone. The girls sometimes contemplated breaking off their relationship but experienced great ambivalence. Some of their fears,

such as fear of entrapment, drove them to end their relationships, while others, such as fear of change, prevented action. Hope for change was a large factor in their acceptance of their unhappy situations and their minimization of the danger of increasing physical violence. Since indecision results from ambivalence, it is not surprising that the females went in and out of their relationships several times before making a final break.

The young women wrestled with their ambivalent feelings, trying to gain control of the situation. For the most part the ambivalence they experienced only served to further dis-empower them since they were confused and unable to make confident decisions. Participants' experiences of ambivalence are represented in figure 5-2. The large ball represents the conflicting thoughts and feelings of the participants. Although their feelings were constantly changing, the ball is often frozen by this indecision and when it does move external forces are often needed to provide momentum. However, the very emotions that usually left the girls feeling paralyzed could become catalysts for change and empowerment especially when they were combined with increased personal insight and support from others.

Figure 5-2. Ambivalence in an Abusive Relationship

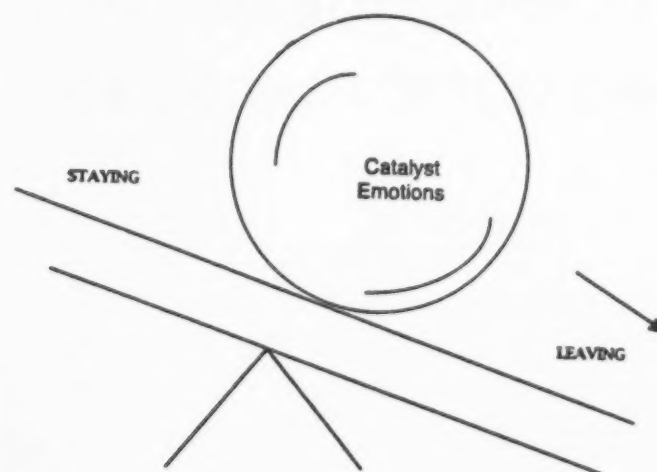


NiCarthy describes how a particular blend of experiences and emotions can upset the equilibrium of the abusive pattern:

There are common themes to these stories. The reasons for leaving can be summarized this way: increasing fear following an intolerable escalation of abuse or a heightened awareness of its danger, loss of hope that the partner would change; increased hope for a good life without the partner; diminished fear of life without the partner. In other words, during the course of the relationship the women had made decisions by balancing their fear of staying against the hope for an improved relationship without the partner, or weighing the hope for in the relationship with their fear of living alone. Although they didn't necessarily state it that way, many left when there was a shift in the balance of fear or hope. (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 315)

When the reasons for leaving outweighed those for staying they became motivated toward change and empowerment. This is illustrated in Figure 5-3 where a certain combination of feelings and experiences provides momentum for the 'ball' of conflicting emotions to roll forward leading to positive action, empowerment and eventual escape from abuse.

Figure 5-3. Catalyst Emotions in an Abusive Relationship



Acknowledgement

Times of introspection and acknowledgement initiated the process of change. Feelings of regret seemed to be particularly powerful agents of change for the abused females that further tipped the balance toward empowerment. The participants gradually realized that they had missed out on many experiences and had grown up too fast. They grieved the loss of family and friends as well as the loss of their own identities.

Increasing acknowledgement also stemmed from escalating violence, continuing disappointment and realization of little hope for improvement in their situations. As the young women acknowledged the reality of their relationships, they gathered the courage to escape from them. They became aware of patterns which affected their behavior and of alternatives to their present situations. NiCarthy found that acknowledgement was crucial to one leaving an abusive situation, "But when it became clear that she couldn't rescue someone who wasn't trying to rescue himself, she left right away" (NiCarthy, 1987, p. 299). Acknowledgement and connection went hand in hand since feedback from others provided valuable knowledge and insight to the young women.

Connection

When lost in a maze, meeting another may provide support and direction to assist one in finding a way out of the dilemma. Since they were extremely isolated, any positive connection with others had a significant influence on the participants. A simple comment made by an acquaintance could be very powerful, especially if it conveyed to the abuse victim that others were aware of the abuse or had had similar experiences. As they became more connected, participants compared their situations to those of others and, thus, became aware of available resources and support.

As they began to realize that others cared, the young women felt less isolated and became more in touch with their own feelings and needs. Their confidence grew and they began to see alternatives to their present situations. When they perceived that others would support them, they reached out and felt a sense of belonging. This affiliation empowered them to take more risks including the risk of leaving the relationship. Straus found that recovery

from abuse can take place only within the context of relationships, not in isolation (1994, p. 27) and Herman (1992) established that such recovery is based upon empowerment and the creation of new connections.

Empowerment

Increased acknowledgement of the abuse and awareness of alternatives combined with the influence and support of others to initiate the young women's growing empowerment. Empowerment began as they were able to negotiate the maze and became free to choose a new path. In NiCarthy's study:

Many of the women were demoralized, brainwashed and physically and emotionally depleted, yet when it was clearly necessary, they garnered the strength to act with decisiveness and courage. Their ability to do that in the face of such obstacles is the most puzzling aspect of their lives, ... Against all odds, some of the women felt stronger when they were preparing to leave than when they first had entered the relationship.

(NiCarthy, 1987, p. 299 - 300)

In this study, as well, the young women became stronger as they prepared to leave the abusive situations. Empowerment meant that they became more in control, more autonomous, more assertive and more expressive of their feelings and needs. They were able to make and carry out decisions since they felt stronger, possessed a greater sense of self and received encouragement and support from others.

The young women had matured considerably during their time 'in the maze.' They had become wiser and less vulnerable since they had a better understanding of their experience of abuse and they no longer blamed themselves for their failed relationships. They had reestablished bonds with family and friends, and they had regained some of their personal power and identity. They no longer felt entrapped as they had discovered that they could break free from abuse and be in charge of their own lives.

The Experience of the Abused Young Adolescent

In many ways the experience of abuse of adolescent females and their older counterparts are similar. Both are likely to experience isolation and

ambivalence, to blame themselves for the abuse, to feel responsible for changing the relationship and to remain in abusive relationships hoping for change.

Studies have shown that young adolescent females are at a very vulnerable point in their lives (Stern, 1990, Gilligan, 1991, Pipher, 1994) and the differences between them and older females account for some of this vulnerability. In this study some important differences were identified between the experience of the adolescent girl and the older female. These differences included, lack of cognitive and emotional maturity, poverty of experience in and knowledge of intimate relationships, the powerful influences of the peer culture and of the media, and increased isolation from adult influence. Significant power imbalances related to age differentials of the male partners within the relationships also increased the vulnerability of the females.

These young women were highly influenced by their peer culture and they seemed to have entered the male/female relationships more to impress their friends than because of genuine attraction and interest in a particular young man. They lacked experience in intimate relationships and when they obtained information regarding relationships it was from the media with its traditional and romanticized notions of intimacy. This meant that the young women did not have appropriate expectations regarding acceptable behaviour within an intimate relationship and were frequently accepting of abusive behavior. There was a considerable power differential in these relationships because of the physical maturity of the older males compared to their younger female partners, and this made it easier for the males to exercise control over the women. Since they were emotionally and cognitively immature, the young women were not as able as an older female to recognize the abuse, problem solve and make competent decisions regarding their unhappy situations.

Related to the enormous influence of the peer culture in adolescence is the increased separation of the early adolescent from the support of important adults. It seems that the more compelling the approval of a young woman's friends becomes, the more she pulls away from her parents and other adults

friends and relatives. An older female is more likely to have negotiated the stage of generational disconnection and, when in difficulty, may be more likely to reach out for support from significant elders in her life.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Abuse of teenage girls by male partners is a serious problem that deeply affects the happiness, development and adjustment of young women and often sets the stage for abusive marriages in adulthood. The participants in this study have shown that when young girls are developmentally immature, insecure, naive and easily influenced, they may be extremely susceptible to abusive relationships. When they become involved with abusive males their feelings of vulnerability, isolation, powerlessness and entrapment grow as the abusive relationship progresses. Conflicting thoughts and emotions regarding their ill-fated plights may cause them to fluctuate between paralysis, indecision and positive action. However, growing acknowledgement and reconnection to self and others can tip the balance giving them the courage and power required to leave.

When young women are asked what might have helped them during the period of the abuse, they often say that by the time it occurred it was almost too late. They needed information on abuse within relationships before the violence happened to them. In addition to the knowledge that battering is not an uncommon experience for young women, they also needed to know about relationships, about ways to maintain their own self-esteem and self-assertiveness, and about the danger of becoming isolated from family or friends when they become involved in relationships. (Lewis, 1987, p. 6)

In order to avoid abuse, young women require education, encouragement and support so that they are less vulnerable; and more knowledgeable, self confident, connected and empowered. Oreinstein (1994) has pertinent advice in this regard:

Young women with healthy self-esteem have an appropriate sense of their potential, their competence, and their innate value as individuals. They feel a sense of entitlement: license to take up space in the world, a right to be heard and to express the full spectrum of human emotions. (Oreinstein, 1994, p. xix)

Such young women are unlikely to be abused by others.

In order to raise healthier girls, we must look carefully at what we tell them, often unconsciously, often subtly, about their worth relative to boys. We must look at what young women value about themselves - the areas of importance by which they measure their self-esteem - as well as the potential sources of strength and competence that, too often, they learn to devalue. (Oreinstein, 1994, p. xxviii-xxix)

Many forces contribute to the vulnerability and dis-empowerment of teenage girls in our society, and to break the cycle of abuse, parents, educators, professionals and governments must work together to educate, strengthen, support and empower young women.

Parenting

Parents can validate their daughters by listening to them, encouraging critical thinking and problem solving, and helping them to interpret the media critically. They can encourage them to carefully choose their friends, both male and female, and to not feel pressured to enter into intimate relationships too early. They can encourage individual accomplishment and downplay one's "appearance as a critical human dimension" (Pipher, p. 288). Parents can help their daughters feel complete by modelling flexible roles; fathers who are nurturing, affectionate and interested in the activities of their daughters and mothers who are confident, self-sufficient and "responsive, but not responsible for their family members" (Pipher, 1994, p. 286).

Certain kinds of homes help girls hold on to their true selves. These homes offer young women both protection and challenges. These are the homes that offer girls affection and structure. Girls hear the message, 'I love you, but I have expectations'. ... What holds girls' lives in place is love and respect for their parents. Since children learn about relationships in their homes, parents can greatly influence children's future relationship patterns by appropriate role modelling. ... Good parents model the respect and equality that they want their daughters to experience in the outside world. ... All of us have

been socialized to behave in gender-stereotyped ways. Parents must think about what their behavior teaches their daughters. Having a home with true equity between the sexes is an impossible ideal, but it helps girls to see that their parents are working toward this. They will respect the effort. (Pipher, 1994, p. 284-286)

Adams suggests that "to help teens avoid exploitation within a romantic relationship, parents can label abusive behavior, talk about love never justifying abuse, and help teens evaluate relationships" (1984, p. 134). They can teach their daughters assertive behaviour and help them to examine possible problematic situations before they occur, thus giving them a repertoire of appropriate responses. It is important for parents to discuss relevant and important issues with their female children and to keep the lines of communication open so that their daughters will not be so susceptible to the isolation characteristic of abusive relationships.

Education

Pipher (1995) points out that schools are not user friendly for adolescent girls. Many young women are sexually and physically harassed at school, and appropriate policies protecting all students from this type of maltreatment are required. Schools should be places where all students feel safe and are able to develop their fullest potential. Instead they are all too often places where many students, particularly females, feel unacknowledged, undermined and threatened. "Teachers need equity training. ... Schools need to be structured in ways that validate and nurture strengths in female students" (Pipher, p. 290).

Schools can foster students' self-esteem and the development of pro-social skills and violence prevention from kindergarten through high school. Although this type of education is already happening in some classrooms it needs to become a part of the school curriculum at all grade levels. Teachers across Canada have already found ways to integrate these topics into the curriculum. "The problem lies in a lack of commitment and consistency in these approaches across all boards." (Jaffe, 1993, Canadian School Boards Association).

In my opinion, schools are the ideal place to teach young people how to achieve positive, nurturing relationships and how to avoid abusive ones. Educators can create an atmosphere of caring and mutual respect in schools by modelling positive social skills between themselves, their colleagues and their students. They can hold student forums to talk about how society's accepting attitudes toward violence among intimates contribute to its occurrence and how such attitudes can be changed. Violence prevention plans and conflict resolution programs can be presented to students thereby teaching them strategies they can carry over into their personal lives. Peter Jaffe suggests that schools should "institute school policies and protocols that respond to violence in an effective manner that no longer blames the victim and avoids holding the perpetrators accountable for their behaviour" (Jaffe, 1993, Canadian School Boards Association).

Teachers should be aware that many young people are subjected to abuse in their homes and in their relationships, and that it is critical that school staff be willing and able to recognize signs of abuse and provide support and referral for abused students. Young teens, both male and female, should be taught to recognize signs of abuse and should know where to get further information and support if they need it.

Professional Intervention

We need a cooperative effort from all vantage points: sociopolitically for the future but also clinically to relieve the pain in the present" (Geller, p. 157). Our long-range goal should be to prevent abuse, but we also need to deal with the pain of those presently in abusive situations. "The task of changing violence between partners is enormous. Many victims do not receive the validation and support they require from helping professionals. Abusers also need help, but first and foremost, they need to be held accountable for their abusive behavior.

In recent years, police have drastically changed their attitudes towards abuse and their procedures for handling violent situations. New laws mean that they are able to automatically charge violent offenders, rather than expecting the victim to do so, and the "stalking law" provides greater protection for females who are in the precarious position of recently breaking

off an unhealthy relationship. These changes have made a great difference to both victims, who feel more supported when they decide to leave and are, therefore, less likely to change their minds, and to offenders who are unable to deny the unacceptability of their behavior. The police and legal service should be commended for their progressive approach. However, their actions are often thwarted by the attitudes and actions of other well-meaning, but poorly informed, professionals. Doctors, lawyers, judges, and educators need to become more enlightened regarding abuse, and more responsive to the plight of victims.

It is important for care givers to understand that abused females tend to hide the fact that they are abused. All too often young women present with severe anxiety to doctors and are simply treated with medication and sent home without addressing the cause of that anxiety. Teachers may overlook the possibility that the disturbed female students may be abuse victims and neglect to broach the subject of abuse with them. This lack of acknowledgement of the underlying trauma in their lives only serves to further dis-empower victims and to increase their isolation. It is critical that professionals be properly trained in the dynamics of relationship abuse and the most effective strategies for dealing with it so that abused young women receive the attention, counselling and support that they require.

Societal and Cultural Implications

Straus reminds us that society, in general, is ultimately responsible for the protection and healthy development of the young. In her words:

Violence in the life of an adolescent is a crisis for development at all levels: as long as communities and the greater social fabric are profoundly associated with violence in adolescence, therapy alone will not be sufficient. Violence is also a social problem, ultimately requiring social and political as well as personal solutions. (Straus, 1994, p. 30)

We must strengthen societal taboos against violence since "it's hard for girls to grow into independent, autonomous people when they are fearful for their physical safety" (Pipher, p 292). The roots of the pervasive mistreatment of females in Canada today lie in a tradition of male domination over women

that is embedded in our culture, and accepted by both men and women.

Since adolescents are greatly influenced by the mass media, a comprehensive media campaign directed at youth would be most effective in providing education to young women regarding the pitfalls of abusive relationships. Young people need support to learn how to be assertive rather than aggressive and gentle, and loving, rather than domineering, and controlling. Governmental organizations and communities can provide social programs, such as conflict resolution training for children of domestic violence and workshops on assertiveness training and communication skills that may help to break the cycle of abuse in our society. Prevention programs focused on youth, such as the recent "Talk it Out" (1991) and "Keep on Talking" (1992) campaigns, sponsored by the Office of the Prevention of Family Violence in Edmonton, Alberta, need to be continued and expanded. With a concentrated effort "in the long term we can expect the same attitudes about violence we now hold for drinking and driving, polluting the environment and smoking" (Jaffe, 1993, p. 2).

Opportunities for Future Research

The area of adolescent relationships requires much additional research. Studies are needed to compare healthy and unhealthy relationships and to explore factors that lead to and perpetuate relationship abuse. In addition to female victims, the experiences of male abusers, female abusers and male victims also need to be investigated. Research comparing the attitudes of youth who have taken part in prevention programs to those who have not would be most valuable in providing future direction for education and prevention. Relationships of young teens differ from those of older teens and knowledge of these differences would also facilitate planning of effective educational and social programs. Research may help to determine at what stage prevention and intervention strategies are likely to be most effective, and to develop more successful strategies for parents, educators and counsellors. Societal changes are needed, and valid research findings would help to spotlight potential reforms and encourage enlightened attitudes toward positive change.

Concluding Remarks

This study has identified vulnerability, isolation, powerlessness, entrapment and ambivalence as themes that keep young woman in abusive relationships; and acknowledgement and connection as themes that empower them to escape from abusive relationships. Findings suggest that lack of knowledge and experience, isolation from family, friends and community, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and a tendency to disregard self for the sake of others are all factors that may predispose one to abuse. Conversely, knowledge and reconnection with self and others are factors enabling females to avoid or escape abusive situations. To become confident, happy individuals, able to make informed choices and avoid abuse in their lives, young women require proactive support and education so that they can develop the awareness and ability to respect and care for themselves and to make confident life decisions. They need a sense of security provided by a healthy connection to family, friends and community.

In order to accomplish these goals young women must be valued for their individuality, strength and intelligence rather than their appearance, popularity or sexuality. In my opinion, it is the responsibility of parents, teachers, and adult society in general, to support and mentor young women so that they can become secure, confident individuals capable of developing healthy, non-violent intimate relationships. Such support and education, I believe, is the key to breaking the cycle of abuse in our society, since teens in healthy relationships tend to become adults in healthy relationships.

I hope that my findings will be helpful to young women and those who care about and work with them. A greater understanding of the experience of young abuse victims will help teachers and counsellors to provide appropriate proactive education and support for young women and their parents. Informed professionals can better intervene to reduce the debilitating, long term effects of dating abuse and domestic violence, by minimizing or preventing such abuse before dysfunctional adolescent relationships become abusive marriages.

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Appendix A
University of Alberta
Faculty of Education
Description of Project and Consent

Qualitative Research Project

**Research Title: Dynamics of Relationships involving Abuse by
Males toward Adolescent Female Partners**

Researcher: Carolyn Schoepp, Masters Candidate
Phone 339-2170

Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Paulson
Department of Educational Psychology

This research is being done for a Master's thesis in Educational Psychology. The topic to be explored is the experience of adolescent females in intimate relationships with abusive male partners. It is anticipated that the project will be a positive experience for the participants and that the information they share will be helpful to female adolescents and to those who work with them.

The research will be conducted by myself with the cooperation of approximately four volunteer participants. I will meet with each participant a minimum of three times. During the first meeting we will get to know each other and discuss goals, expectations and procedures. Informed consent will be obtained from participants at this time.

The second meeting will consist of data gathering. The participant will describe her experience to me. I will ask questions to get an accurate picture of her experience. This interview will be taped and later transcribed using a pseudonym for the participant's name. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the original tape. I will analyze the transcribed interview and attempt to identify themes that represent the experience of the participant.

During the third meeting I will share with the participant the themes that emerge from my analysis. She will provide me with feedback that will validate or refute my observations and interpretations. My data will be revised or expanded as a result.

When I have completed interviewing all three participants, I will analyze the data for common themes. Findings will be described in my thesis. It will be

published and accessible at the University of Alberta Library.

This is a voluntary project and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. If a participant decides to withdraw, the interview tapes will be erased in her presence. Should a participant require support in dealing with issues related to the project, I will refer her to appropriate resources. It is hoped that the project will be a positive experience for the participants as well as the researcher.

Consent

This is to certify that I have read the above description and agree to take part as a volunteer in the above named research project.

I hereby give permission to be interviewed and for the interviews to be tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed into written form using a pseudonym of my choice.

I understand that at the completion of the research the tapes will be erased. I understand that the information will be published in the form of a thesis, and may be published in a professional journal. I further understand that every effort will be made to remove any identifying information.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time without penalty

Date _____

Signature _____

Appendix B

University of Alberta - Faculty of Education
Parental Consent

Research Title: Dynamics of Relationships involving Abuse by Males toward Adolescent Female Partners

Researcher: Carolyn Schoepp, Masters Candidate
Phone 339-2170

Supervisor: Dr. Barb Paulson
Department of Educational Psychology

This is to certify that I have read the attached description
and agree to allow my _____

to take part as a
volunteer in the above named research project.
I hereby give permission for her to be interviewed and for
the interviews to be tape-recorded and subsequently
transcribed into written form using a pseudonym of her
choice. I understand that at the completion of the research the
tapes will be erased. I understand that the information will
be published in the form of a thesis, and may be published
in a professional journal. I further understand that every
effort will be made to remove any identifying information.
I understand that she is free to withdraw her consent and
terminate her participation at any time without penalty

Date

Parental Signature(s)

Appendix C

Verbal Presentation

Hi, my name is Carolyn Schoepp. I am interested in conducting research entitled **Dynamics of Relationships involving Abuse by Males toward Adolescent Female Partners.**

The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of abusive relationships involving adolescent females. I hope to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be involved in such a relationship. The results will be published as my master's thesis and may be published in a professional journal.

The research will be conducted by myself with the cooperation of volunteer participants. I will meet with each participant a minimum of three times. During the first meeting we will get to know each other and discuss goals, expectations and procedures. Informed consent will be obtained from participants at this time.

The second meeting will consist of data gathering. The participant will describe her experience to me. I will ask questions to get an accurate picture of her experience. This interview will be taped and later transcribed using a pseudonym for the participant's name. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the original tape. I will analyze the transcribed interview and attempt to identify themes that represent the experience of the participant.

During the third meeting I will share with the participant the themes that emerge from my analysis. She will provide me with feedback that will validate or refute my observations and interpretations. My data will be revised or expanded as a result.

When I have completed interviewing all three participants, I will analyze the data for common themes. Findings will be described in my thesis that will be published and accessible through the University of Alberta Library.

This is a voluntary project and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. If a participant decides to withdraw, the interview tapes will be erased in her presence. Participant's real names will not be used in any written documents. Should a participant require support in dealing with issues related to the project, I will refer her to appropriate resources. It is hoped that the project will be a positive experience for the participants as well as the researcher.

Appendix D

OPPORTUNITY TO VOLUNTEER AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I am interested in conducting research entitled **Dynamics of Relationships involving Abuse by Males toward Adolescent Female Partners**. The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of abusive relationships involving adolescent females. I hope to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be involved in such a relationship. The results will be published as my master's thesis and may be published in a professional journal. The research will be conducted by myself with the cooperation of volunteer participants. I will meet with each participant a minimum of three times. During the first meeting we will get to know each other and discuss goals, expectations and procedures. Informed consent will be obtained from participants at this time.

The second meeting will consist of data gathering. The participant will describe her experience to me. I will ask questions to get an accurate picture of her experience. This interview will be taped and later transcribed using a pseudonym for the participant's name. Only myself and my supervisor will have access to the original tape. I will analyze the transcribed interview and attempt to identify themes that represent the experience of the participant.

During the third meeting I will share with the participant the themes that emerge from my analysis. She will provide me with feedback that will validate or refute my observations and interpretations. My data will be revised or expanded as a result.

When I have completed interviewing all three participants, I will analyze the data for common themes. Findings will be described in my thesis that will be published and accessible through the University of Alberta Library. This is a voluntary project and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty. If a participant decides to withdraw, the interview tapes will be erased in her presence. Participant's real names will not be used in any written documents. Should a participant require support in dealing with issues related to the project, I will refer her to appropriate resources. It is hoped that the project will be a positive experience for the participants as well as the researcher.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please call me at 339-2170 or 542-5544

Carolyn Schoepp

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

How would you describe your relationship?

What were your reasons for entering the relationship?

What are good things about the relationship?

How are your values like your partner's?

How are your values different from your partner's?

When you have differences how are they settled?

In what way is the relationship abusive?

When did the relationship become abusive?

What is it like for you to be in the relationship?

What makes you stay in the relationship?

What makes you happy about the relationship?

What things cause you to want out of the relationship?

What makes you angry, afraid, frustrated, hurt?

Has the relationship increased or decreased your self-esteem? How?

Who do you talk to about the relationship?

Has the relationship affected your friendships?

Has the relationship affected your relationship with your family?

What advice would you give to other females regarding relationships?

Appendix F

Table 5-1

Sample of Thematic Abstraction of Vicki's Relationship

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Two levels of Abstraction	
	1.Paraphrases	2.Themes
101. It felt kind of good that someone older liked me, cause he is five years older.	She felt flattered that he liked her	Feels good about herself Has greater status with peers
102. I always wondered what he expected from me.	She was not sure of her role as his girlfriend.	Feels unsure of self
103. Uh, since his other girlfriends were older they would do more things. So, I was only thirteen when we met.	She felt pressured by his expectations.	Feels afraid Feels vulnerable
104. He said he couldn't have a good time with me there.	She felt left out.	Feels rejected Feels isolated
105. I don't like it. I like to do stuff with the family and I like to go places and do stuff would like it if he did.	She feels torn between her family and her partner.	Feels frustrated Feels ambivalent Feels isolated all together, you know. I
106. Well, I used to never do anything cause he would never want to but now I do it anyhow.	She feels more in control.	Feels empowered
107. Like we'll go to his house everyday and watch movies or whatever and then he'll go out with his friends after I go home. He never takes me anywhere so....	She feels rejected and left out.	Feels isolated
108. I feel like he must not think I'm good enough for his friends.	She feels rejected and left out.	Feels isolated